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TOWER *of* SAND

Books by

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

MEAT

THE MAN WHO SAW THROUGH HEAVEN

URKEY ISLAND

TABOO

THE TERRIBLE WOMAN

ISLES OF THE BLEST

THE SHAME DANCE

LAND'S END

STORM

TOWER *of* SAND

& OTHER STORIES

By

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

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TOWER *of* SAND

I

TOWER OF SAND

THIS is the story the wireless sailor told me. We had been talking of fixed ideas.

"Well, this old geezer I was tellin' you about at Tower of Sand, he had 'em. Bad. Here's what he used to do. Used to come down to the compass-house in the five-to-midnight watch, stand outside the window, cough one of them high, hackle coughs of his, and of course I look out and he sees me, and 'Want to know anything about them waters off yonder?' he'd ask. Stick his old wiggle-tip of a nose against the pane and hypnotize me with his soapy eyes and wave a finger over the cliff. 'Want to know anything about them waters in your line of business, young fellah?'

"Laugh if you want to, but it used to get my goat. Give me a creep, almost. 'Specially a thick night, with a surf on the beach down there under the cliff and the foghorn wailin' blue bellyache and all outdoors goin' black and white, white and black, with that everlastin' merry-go-round of the light slicin' through the mist. There he'll stand, the damp drippin' off his beak and his old finger-bone wavin' into nothingness, absolute.

" 'Want to know anything about them waters, young man?'

" 'No, I don't!' I holler. 'What's more, Uncle Two Fathom,' I used to holler, 'you ought to be abed.'

" 'How?' says he, cuppin' a hand over his ear. He's always hard of hearin' at that point. 'How? Did you say I was to come in?'

"He wasn't human, you understand. He's something they'd lost at sea in a storm; fantom, sort of, come draggin' its bones up the cliff a dirty night to let me know about 'them waters.' As if dry ground at Tower of Sand Station ain't bad enough. Honest to God, if you knew that place——"

I do know it. As it happens, I've stood there myself and on a thick night in Autumn, too, nor did I have to tell the marrow of my bones that they were forty-odd long, loud miles offshore, at the snapper-end, as it were, of a curling lash of sand. I've stood there more than once and watched the beams of the great lens overhead "slicin' through the mist," four greenish gigantic spokes of incandescent vapor, wheeling, wheeling, silently, inexorably, interminably wheeling in the high plane of the sky—till between two winks the flaming cross stood still and it was myself that was being swept, inversely—myself and the ghost-lit dome of Tower of Sand, the green-glimmering rooms of the station buildings, the mast with its web of aërials, the racing rails of the boundary-fence, the beginnings of outer darkness, moorlands, waste of dune, booming of hidden, almost subterranean, surf—all in one ver-

tiginous sweep around the axis of the dim central cylinder of the light.

I have seen the "compass-watch" changing at midnight—without pomp—one solitary, infinitesimal biped creeping down through the systems of wheeling penumbræ, rubbing his eyes with microscopic fists, his bell-mouth "gob" pants flapping about his chill ankles, his immortal fraction still back in the bunkhouse, dreaming of the merry lights of Newark or the jolly racket of Omaha.

There is light enough at Tower of Sand, peripatetic, blinding; but its sum is darkness. There is noise, complex, brazen, exanimate, the siren's "blue bellyache," the drone of the bars, the wind sometimes, sometimes the moan of passing ships afraid of one another, sometimes the leaping snap of sparks in the sending-house; but of it all the sum resultant is silence. Months of Winter nights of it ——

My blue-eyed Nebraskan was getting on with his tale.

"Once let the old geezer into the house and there's no gettin' rid of him—unless I want to chance a run up to the light (his son-in-law's the keeper) and tell him come take him away. He'd get into the corner behind the Arco, like a rat, and watch me with his wet eyes.

"I'd no time for him. If there's nothing comin' in on M from the navy ships, or on eight hundred (that's the length for ships wantin' their bearin's), why, a man can always turn her down to six hundred and copy

commercial, for the practise of the thing. Copy, copy; that's the game.

" 'Sit there and warm yourself,' I says. 'I'm busy.'

"Don't worry, he can't hold his lip long. First I'll hear him scrapin' his feet, then I'll hear him scrapin' his stubble beard, then before many minutes I'll hear his voice tunin' up, like a bad needle on a record gettin' ready to sing.

" 'What ye harkin' to, young fellah?'

" 'Ship.'

" 'Square-rigged fellah?'

" 'Don't know.'

" 'Don't know? Not even what she look like? And you tryin' to stuff me you can tell her 'xactly where she sets on the sea—just with your ears to that riggin' there!'

"I show him one night. There's a ship callin' for her bearin's.

" 'Listen here,' says I, puttin' the piece to his ear.

" 'Don't make nothin' o' that,' says he. 'What's the spittin'?'

" 'Code,' says I. 'QTE? What's my bearin'?'

"I swing the compass onto her and shoot the bearin' down coast on the land-wire for Chatham to relay—round forty-eight, if I remember. I lean over and plot it on the wall-chart with the plottin'-string out of Tower of Sand. 'And now,' I says, my ear cocked for Chatham's own—thirty-eight something—and pullin' out the Chatham string, 'this here's her bearin' from

Chatham. And this,' says I, puttin' a finger on the intersection of the two, 'this is the position of said ship, precisely, nine-one-three P. M., ten-eleven, one-nine-two-O ——'

" 'Wonderful!' says Uncle Two Fathom. 'Wonderful!' He get back into his corner and study.

" 'I guess that'll hold him a while,' says I to myself.

"Minute later BRI come in on eight hundred. That's the *Ar'tic*, Boston-bound; I know her without the book. The juice was snappin' that night; I get Nantucket as well as Chatham and our three bearin's on the big boat plot to a pin-point. It makes a guy feel good.

" 'There, Uncle,' says I, leanin' back, 'there she is, hundreds of passengers abroad, all safe; position known to the fraction; captain can undress and go to bed. That's what we call science, that is!'

" 'Wonderful!' says he. 'What kind of water's he in?'

" 'Water?' says I. 'Salt water. What you s'pose?'

" 'Mmmm,' says he, 'to be sure, salt water. How much, though; that's the question. What depth's he got under his keel? What kind of bottom's he got, good holdin' ground or only tol'ble, happen he got to let his anchor go quick? What's he got for shoals in his lee, happen the wind come on to blow? How's the tide set, them parts? How's a hundred 'n' one things?'

" 'Search me!' I give him a laugh. 'I should worry about such things!'

" 'All right, all right, my son. Though if *I* was master of that craft out there I warrant you *would* worry about them questions a mite—just a mite—before I should feel easy to turn in and leave you carry on my navigatin' for me, dry ashore here with a rubber ear-dingus and a finger-tapper and a wad o' gum. Wonderful!'

" 'You dumb-bell!' says I. 'Us guys ain't here for that. All we got to do is give their bearin's when they need 'em, in a fog, say, and all the captain's got to do is plot his position with a pin and find out all the rest of such things from his chart.'

" '*Chart!*' I wish you could've heard the way he says it!

" 'Don't you know,' says I, 'that a ship carries *charts?*'

" '*Gov'ment* charts!'

" 'Charts that'll tell him all them hundred 'n' one things you're so worried over—depth and bottom and tides ——'

" '*If*,' says he, 'if *only*,' says he with a snigger, 'they was *reliable!*'

"I wish you could've seen him then. Up he got on his feet, pointin' at me fierce with a kind of a dirty old mailin'-tube he used to drag around like a kid with a made-up spy-glass. Mad as the schoolma'am with the spitball in her back hair.

" 'One instance; just one single instance, young man. Foggy night, black as a hat. Now say you and your mates, you Gov'ment boys, go to work and give a shipmaster his bearin's by the coast, precise. Very well. Say he sticks his precious pin into his precious Gov'ment chart and finds the couple days of thick weather and a current that ain't in the book has set him quite a piece to the south'rd of his course.'

" 'All right; easy as she goes. Nearest figger to his pin tells him he's got a good twenty fathom of water where he lays. Easy as she goes. Nothin' to worry. Only now s'pose, on a chance, he has the bos'n heave the lead just once for luck, and lo 'n' behold, she mark a bare six fathom to mud, shoalin' to five next heave, and now come to think of it there's a sound like breakers on his port hand and something just as queer on his sta'board and God knows what on his lee quarter, and blacker'n a hat. And you Gov'ment lads settin' ashore here dry and comfortable, and ready to give him all the cheer there is in the fact that where he sets on his Gov'ment chart there can't be a mite of bother nowheres near. Easy as she goes! Wonderful!'

" 'S'posin',' says he, shrillin' up still higher, 's'posin', all unbeknownst to you Gov'ment lads and the almighty Coast 'n' Ge'detic Survey, this shipmaster finds himself afoul of Two Fathom Ledge and the tide goin'!'

" 'From the way you put it he's out of luck. What kind of a place is that?'

"Well, sir, that's all he's been waitin' for all Winter. You should've seen his thumb go into that mailin'-tube, and before I know boo he's got a dirty curl of a red-and-blue-ink map spread out all over my instruments.

" 'Cracky!' says I, 'what ward in Chicago's that?' It's more like the maze in the park, though, all cluttered with lost figgers and remarks and what-not. 'What street's this one?' says I to be funny, pointin' a finger.

" 'This,' says he, wettin' his chops, 'this here is Finback Draw, same's you see. Westerin' breezes you're all right here, good water for twenty to thirty cable-lengths, keepin' them rips on Middle Bank close aboard your weather-hand. Come about any time, you can, fetch back into Gay Boy, ten fathom, and out East Channel all clear. Mindin' the elbow of the Footstone, though. You'll see a cast of green onto it, least swell runnin'. Then you're all deep water as you go.'

" 'Mmmm,' says I. 'Nice street. *If* you know your way.'

" 'I know it,' says he. 'Don't worry there. I'll guarantee to take a vessel into Two Fathom and out again, blackest night, blindfold.'

" 'Mmmm,' says I. 'Nice class o' fish live there?'

"Seem like nothin' could get his goat. He take me serious.

" 'Upper end here,' he says, puddlin' with his thumb,

'say you got room in your ice for a couple thousand of prime halibut—and you want to resk it—along the middle of April, say—you lay into the upper end of Finback and leave your dories range inunder the rips on Middle Bank—couple hours, no more. Ain't a finer halibut ground in the North Atlantic Ocean.'

" 'Wonderful!' says I. 'Wonderful! Where's this place to?'

"He stand there lookin' at me, and you wouldn't've said he was the same man. Chest beginnin' to swell out, elbows kind of cock.

" 'Go down to Washington, D. C.,' he says, half sour and half sarcastic, 'and ask one of them Ge'detic fellahs. They're paid good sal'ries to know just precisely such things as that.'

" 'Wonderful!' says I, rollin' up his map off my things. 'Well,' says I, bendin' an ear to the land-wire where Chatham's callin' me snappish to stand by, 'I'm busy now,' says I. 'Much obliged for the fun.'

" 'What you mean by that?' says he. 'Fun!'

" 'I mean bunk,' says I. 'I mean I wasn't born yesterday, and I don't string as easy as I look. There ain't no such fancy fish-village in the ocean. Absolutely no such place. All right,' I give Chatham, 'K.'

"I'm busy about five minutes then ranging a ship. I get it finally and shoot it to Chatham to relay (we can't 'send' from the compass-house at Tower of Sand that Winter, you understand), and, as I say, it must be

five minutes before I have a chance to look at the old man again.

"Ever see a nice new oversize cord tire run out of the factory and onto a roofin'-nail? Flat? That's him. You'd think he's lost his last friend and the cow dead and the mortgage due. Sittin' there pried into the corner, with his shoulders hung together and his chin sagged and almost tears in his eyes. If you could've seen him once——"

It was as if the wish, reiterated so often, were the father to my thought.

"Do you know, I shouldn't wonder if I had." Memory skipped back.

"Was this Uncle Two Fathom of yours a man with a reddish whisker three days old, very long upended feet, one or the other of his eyes given to squinting, and a sour taste in his mouth?"

"That's him! Well, I'll be! That's him!"

He used to sit in the relic of a deck-chair in a sunny angle between the light and the keeper's house that Winter I was in the neighborhood, a relic himself, not so much old as carelessly used. I had never noticed him with more than the corner of an eye; that's why I had forgotten him till now.

A man, as I say, not so much old as carelessly used; a rag, as it were; an honest, stout piece of goods, snatched up to wipe a gear in the engine of destiny and thrown away. A dreamer. If ever I saw the marks of that vice on any face they were on his. A dreamer

dreaming to the end, yet conscious all the while of the figures of the waking about him, passing him by—his equals, even his subordinates, of other days, going forward confidently to their several goals, achievement, solid substance, moderate fame. The bitter dreamer of a discredited dream.

It was the tale of the wireless sailorman that put flesh on Memory's bones. As he went on to recollect the main facts of the old gentleman's biography, poured out in part from that corner of the compass-house and in part in other corners of Tower of Sand, in part petulantly, in part, as the mood took him, with shrill defiance and senile rage—as my blue-orbed prairie princeling (to whom it must all have seemed the utterest moon-stuff) went on to regale me with the small bread of Two Fathom's epic, the outlines of the dream grew clear.

Like all really devastating obsessions, it had its feet and beginnings on the ground—or, literally, in the sea. What more logical than that, torn between the two impulses, on the one hand to keep it to himself for its prime and easy halibut, on the other to exploit it amongst the sea fraternity (with some credit in fame) as a menace to ships—what more inevitable, I say, than that this small chance-come-upon billowing of earth, felt out with anchor and lead-line beneath the blue plain of the sea, should have assumed from the very outset a certain dramatic, spirit-itching, top-heavy importance in the young schooner captain's mind?

It is to be inferred that he very early decided to take the credit and let the cash go. So we find him approaching with a fine humanitarian zest his Congressman. The Congressman, campaigning for reëlection, fed him with words of promise. If returned he would take the matter up with the Coast and Geodetic authorities, "cross his heart and hope to die," as Two Fathom told the sailor.

Later, being returned, the lawgiver's tune had changed.

" ' 'Tain't as if it was so goldarn important,' says he. ' 'Tain't as if there was anybody 'ceptin' a few fishermen ever got into them waters—'ceptin' as you might say by accident.'

" 'Yeh,' says I, 'by accident! Goin' to help a steamer cap'n any that he happen to come there by *accident?*'

" 'Pshaw,' says he, ' 'tain't liable. You leave them matters to the Survey and go on back to your fishin'; that's my advice to you, my friend.' "

So "the iron entered into his soul." There's a lapse then of some ten years or so, Achilles sulking under the tent of the offshore sky, returning ever and ever more glumly and to the hurt of his fishing, in season and out, to plumb with lead and soap the familiar shallows, plot the submarine windings of shoals and channel, map out with the blue ink of verity and the red ink of passion the hidden terrain, brooding over this obscure

and fatal ledge of his like one mother to a monstrous child.

Then there came, it seems, a rebellious *tour de force*. Packing his satchel, he went himself to Washington, bearded the lions of the Coast and Geodetic in their den, switched their very whiskers with the momentous chart. It must have been heart-breaking.

" ' 'Tain't likely,' says one; ' Tain't fatal,' says another. ' 'Tain't scientific'ly drawed up,' says one; ' 'Tain't there at all,' says another, 'or else our charts'd have it. Them waters have been covered ac'rate and thoroughgoin' and proper. Good day!' "

I say it must have been heart-breaking. But the man's heart was not broken. There followed the years of decline; how many my sailor couldn't say. He had the general color of them from inquiries made among the old-timers in town.

" 'Oh, old Two Fathom,' says they. 'Got some bank or other workin' on his mind later years. Cracked, I figger. Used to be a smart fisherman, too. Come, though, his men begin to leave him. Them men go on shares, you know; 'tain't anyways fair to keep 'em heavin' the lead half their time. Lead catches no cod. Come so finally he had to give up his vessel and go live with his son-in-law over to the light; old man before his time. Too bad.' "

But somewhere between his selling the schooner and his retirement to the light there happened, I gather dimly, the thumping event of his life—the breaking of

his heart. It went to pieces on the one rock it had left to go on—friendship.

"Nathan!" There's something about the very name, as remembered by the sailor from the old man's lips. A casual "Nat" would have been another thing. The full dignity of the dissyllable: "Nathán!" The friend of his manhood, his equal in the fleet, the one among all who had continued to stand up for him, fight for him, lend a patient ear to his "foolishness"—"jolly him along"—"Nathan!"

From the merest scaffolding of fact I feel certain I can rebuild the catastrophe. Nathan, in the early days of the War, when men capable of handling ships were demanded in seas deeper than the fishing-grounds—Nathan, emerging from his cod-scale chrysalis, preparing to try his wings in the outer and vaster world and his feet on the bridge of a transoceanic freighter—Nathan with his boxes packed to go——

Two Fathom, old before his time, long past such possibilities for his own career, come to the house to say good-by—bringing, as might a child its darlingest treasure, or the moribund wizard his sovereign amulet against ill, a new, true bright copy of his chart of Two Fathom Ledge. As though by that act he had nullified for his friend nine-tenths of the prescriptive perils of the sea.

Can you imagine the look on Nathan's face? I can. I can imagine affection battling to hold back the tide of revolt, a revolt years pent, a rebellious hatred of

this diseased thing he had had to watch sapping day by day the life chances of his friend. It would have become at that instant a creature separate and personal, a devil to be cast out, a thing, an object, a paper chart in his hand. I can see Nathan staring at the chart, his eyes confused, his cheeks aflame. I can see him with a sudden malignant force wringing the paper shapeless, strangling it, tearing it—(but no, not tearing it, after all).

I can hear him crying at his comrade: "God Almighty, boy, come out of it! Forget all this two-for-a-nickel fishing-ground small stuff, my boy! You were meant for bigger things than worrying your head over one little sand-bar that's not worth a tinker to any one, and maybe isn't there at all. Be the man you were meant and come along with me. What do you say, boy? Brace up, and let's go!" I can hear the echo of a resounding slap on the back.

In the swift silence following, the silence of one man's world gone to wreck, I can hear the duller echo of another kind of blow—a fist on a mouth.

What happened then it is hard to hazard. Neither of them was accustomed to being struck. Those two friends!

That's how the fellow's heart was broken. That's how he came to be what he was, "an old man before his time," a two-legged survival teetering about the top of Tower of Sand like a senile schoolboy with a

made-up spy-glass, perusing with his "soapy eyes" the beginnings of "them waters."

He would try to think of Nathan as dead. It is doubtful if in his four or five years of exile at the station he had heard the mention of Nathan's name. It would have been like the apparition of a *revenant*, a bitter-triumphal grave-delivery, that day ——

"I seen this guy come into the reservation, spruce-lookin' middle-aged man he was—come with a party one Sunday afternoon in a twin-six painted blue, with no end of nickel and plate glass. No pikers.

" 'Visitors allowed?' says one of the ladies, seein' me by the gate.

" 'Pshaw!' says he. He shooes 'em in with a wink and a grin. 'When you're seein' the sights with me you ain't what you'd call visitors. Well, upon my word!' says he, catching sight of the light-keeper, 'if it ain't Joe Bangs, old boy! How goes it, Joe?'

" 'How goes it, Cap'n?' says Bangs.

" 'Must belong hereabouts,' I figger to myself. Still, that bus don't look like the Cape in Winter. However, it's not my conundrum, and I'm goin' off about my business when I come onto old Two Fathom layin' in his chair in a sunny nook around the corner and nappin' at the sky.

" 'Uncle,' says I, 'you should see the swell company we got to-day. Some class to us,' I'm just sayin', when who should come strollin' around the corner behind me but this same guy in the blue broadcloth and buttons.

"Well, sir, at the sight of the old geezer in the chair he come to a stop. He come to the deadest stop, by and large, I ever seen in my life. Thud! The first thing he does is drop his mouth open. Second thing a hand come up to feel his lip, spasmodic sort of, like it was a welt. Third thing he takes his hand down and don't know what to do with it. Fourth thing he goes as red as a beet.

"And here's Uncle Two Fathom as red as a whole bunch. And the first thing he does when *his* mouth fall open is shut it up tight as wires again.

"Well, I wish you could've been there and seen them two old buzzards—or more like two old dogs run into each other accident'ly around a corner. Ever watched it? Too proud to fight and too scared to run. Glued eye to eye. I wish you could've seen 'em!"

I wonder if I can. The two ghost-gazers. The one, recumbent, staring up at the hero-blue and aureate brass of achievement. The other, erect, staring down at the ashes of a man.

" 'This here,' says I to myself, 'is a funny play.' The stranger ain't red any more; he's as white as a pilla-case. Two Fathom's as white as a sheet. And yet it never once come to me; not once.

" 'Well,' says I to myself, 'this is none of your conundrum, either,' and I'm on my way again around another corner when, lo and behold, thump—thump—thump, here come our blue-and-buttons friend behind me, stiff-legged, eyes front, like a guy that's remem-

bered a pressin' engagement somewhere else. Next thing I hear is them twelve cylinders down there tunin' up to sing.

"The funniest thing, though, was the way he come back that night again. It's like this. First thing I knew of anything bein' wrong with Two Fathom was when Burt come down to relieve me with word the old man was taken.

" 'Taken?' says I. 'With what? Where?'

" 'Taken to his bed,' he says. 'Seem like they find him all gone aheap this afternoon and had to carry him in the house, bodily. Guess the old gentleman's time is about run,' says Burt.

"Well, on my way to the hay I had to pass near the light, and there's Joe Bangs with a lamp in the kitchen door, and there's this blue-and-buttons man outside with no hat on and his hair tousled.

" 'Can't make it out noways,' Banks is sayin'. 'He just seem to've quit. Doctor's got nothin' to go on. All he'll say is he might live till Christmas and he might not. Just seems to've give up and quit. Damn business!'

"The other says the same, slow, in a queer-soundin' tone: '*Damn business!*'

"That's all there is to it. Bangs close the door and the other branches off the other way in the dark, and I hear an engine idlin' down in the road—flivver this time—no twin-six.

"You think it's funny it never come to me. But

somehow it never. A guy standin' watch and watch, same as I and Burt was that week, he's got to get his sleep and not worry his head with other folks' affairs.

"Next mornin', though, I did ask Banks who that man was.

" 'What man,' says he, and that's all he'll say: 'What man you mean?'

" 'Oh, if that's the case,' says I. 'Well, how's the old gent to-day?'

" 'Bad!' he says. He pucker up his forehead and look at the ocean. 'Darnation bad. And so all of a sudden, too. Doc Dean says it's weakenin' of the 'orta, whatever that is; to me it seem he's just spent. Gettin' old. Doc says he might hang on till Christmas —though come to think on it, Christmas ain't so far off, at that. Well, I don' know, don' know. Look like we might have a piece o' weather 'fore long by that sky, don't it?'

"He's right, there. We got our piece of weather, no joke. Wasn't more'n another thirty hours the wind begin to blow all-git-out from the north or thereabouts —all I know is it's a cold one and a wet one, now snow, now sleetin', now a spit of rain. And I and Burt standin' watch and watch.

"Know what that means, Mister? Emil Ganz, our third man, is off on leave a few days—and them turnin' out to be the prize days of the Winter. Well, do you know what it means in a compass-station when there's been no sun to shoot for fifty-sixty hours and

all the ships along the coast wantin' to know their bearin's quick? And two guys doin' the work, watch and watch?

"Well, it don't mean readin' *Pop'lar Science* or copyin' commercial to fill in the gaps. Believe me! I remember the kind of daze I used to be in when I'd get off duty—seven in the morning, say, just comin' on light. 'Light' is good! Comin' on a kind of grayish mud's more like it, and the lighthouse still slicin' round and round, *zoom*, *zoom*, *zoom*, as if it would make any difference to any one in that bellowin' muck. Oh, it's merry! Howl and moan go the wind. Grunt and choke go the fog-horn. Batter and knock go my ankles. Wink and blink go my eyes. *Zoom* come the light again. And there's Mrs. Bangs, say, kind of purple-wristed and string-haired and one shoe untied, siftin' ashes outside the kitchen door.

"Well, I got to ask her what sort of night her pa's had; can't do less.

" 'Not so good,' says she, and shake, shake, shake go the ashes. 'Hangs about the same,' says she. 'Got no urge.' Shake, shake, shake.

" 'I miss him evenin's,' says I, like to yawn my head off.

" 'We'll all miss him,' says she, like to yawn hers. Shake, shake.

"It's funny sometimes, them mornin's, as if I was so all in I was dreamin' on my feet.

"Shake, shake, shake. Shake him down under the

ground. Days ago they've got over the shock of his goin'; already they've almost forgot to grieve. There he lay in the house a corpse—as good as—all quit and done—and yet they have to make the bed and empty the slops still—till Christmas, mebby—that's a bother. Damn business!

"That's the way I used to see it, though, stumblin' up to the bunk-house in the cold, and the whole ocean lickin' up the cliff in the gray. Crazy! Batty! Tragic, all the same, kind of ——

"Well, there's a night. Twelve-to-seven trick, and there's been four solid days of blind weather. Lots of static to-night—funny thing, too—won't often get it like this. It's there, though, a spit and a crackle, and I have to work like a freight-handler gettin' the compass on some of these boys. Never give up, though; *can't* give up. Get 'em in the end and shoot it over the wire to Chatham, same as always.

"Gettin' cold. Throw some coal in the Arco, open her up, come back, sit down. Right away here's BRI on the job. Our old friend the *Ar'tic*, thinks I, wantin' to know the way to Europe and callin' NAE; that's me. All right. I swing the compass on her and jot it down, even before I give her back a K—that's habit. Then I sit up. I got so used to havin' that QTE come on along ('My bearing?') that when it don't it's a jolt. Here's how she read instead: 'NAE from BRI—700.'

"What sense is that? This ain't the time for cha-

rades, you understand; not to-night. There he is, though: '700'—'700'—borin' in through the static—till he got my goat. He takes his breath a minute, and some fellow, BEA, tries to chime in for a bearin', but there's the big fellow back again drowndin' him out with that nonsensical '700.' What's more, here's Chatham on the land-wire wantin' to know what BRI's up to with me, as if it was *my* doin', and I'm sore for fair. 'Tell BRI,' I give him, 'to say something or else get the hell out of the air!'

"BEA's got in at last and I've spotted him and shot her along, and I'm sittin' there scowlin' at the vac-tube, still grouchin' over that silly kid trick of the *Ar'tic's* (you know it's criminal a night like that), when all of a sudden a flash come into my mind. '700,' eh? Reachin' over to the condenser, I turn her down to the seven-hundred wave-length. Sure enough, by Jink, there he is, tryin' me patient, hopin' for luck, 'NAE—NAE.'

"Well, I got no business hangin' around down there a night like this, but before I think I got a hand on the tapper to Chatham: 'Relay BRI DE NAE—K 700.'

"The sender at Chatham must've been too busy to notice and just sent her through without questions. Couple minutes later here's my friend in the ear-piece, and I can almost hear his spark take on a new lease of life:

" 'Is Miles Standish Still Alive?'

"The hell! Strung for a sucker! Just because it

was hereabouts them Pilgrims landed, this funny man out there thinks I must be a cod-head. Miles Standish! I could eat nails! And not able to talk back, that's the worst. But I got to—got to somehow—and it's got to go through Chatham by a fluke. I remember that poem from school ——

" 'Relay BRI DE NAE.' I make a stab at it anyhow, 'SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, JOHN.' And I pray a prayer: fire me out of the navy afterwards if you want to, but just this one time shoot her through!

"I sit there on seven hundred, holdin' my breath, to see what comeback the life-of-the-party'll rake up now, and when it come all the breath went out at once. Listen:

" 'STANDISH CALLED TWO FATHOM—IF ABLE MUST ABSOLUTELY COMMUNICATE—MATTER LIFE AND DEATH.'

"Mister, the hair stood up on my head. There's something about the whole thing—the night, the storm, the stutterin' static, the funny catch of that name, like ghosts, the poor old fellow as good as gone up there to the house, and this tick-tack 'way off on the ocean—'Life and death!'

"What am I goin' to do? There's eight hundred up there full of trouble, and there's where I ought to be, and here's Chatham bawlin' me out: 'Stand by!' And here's where my name is Mud. Unless —— And last minute I see it; here's the phone.

"I grab that crank and I grind it and grind it. Pretty

quick here's Burt up in the bunk-house, half awake and swearin' mad.

" 'Burt,' says I, 'you got to beat it down here. Can't explain now. Come in your shirt. Runnin'!' Slam!

"I couldn't wait for him. I'm out in two minutes and I meet him comin' down, and there's a look on his face. I pass clear of him by rods.

" 'This is a matter of life and death, Burt, and I'll tell you later. Go stand by till I get back, that's a boy!'

"He says something I don't care to hear, and I see him vanish in a puff of light, and the wind set me down at the keeper's kitchen door. I've given it a bang of the fist before it come to me what a fool business I'm about.

"Bangs is in the door with a lantern on his arm, lookin' me over queer.

" 'I don't know,' I keep sayin'. 'All I know is it's the *Ar'tic* ——'

" '*Ar'tic!*' he says. 'Why that's Nathan's boat ——'

" 'Nathan?' says I, as dumb as dumb. 'Well, all I know is he wants to speak with a Miles Standish ——'

" 'That's pa,' he says. 'But look here, God-a-minety ——' He let his voice drop and jerked an eye toward a door standin' open into the kitchen. And then I hear it too. You wouldn't imagine you could hear such a thing in that storm, but I did—I hear it—the creak of a bed.

" 'God-a-minety!' says Bangs.

" 'Yes, I know,' says I. 'This guy tell me it's a matter of life and death, that's all. Guess he must be in trouble out there on the ocean.'

"That bed creaked again. Bangs stepped over and shut the door and come back wipin' sweat.

" 'You go and tell Nathan it's life and death with pa, too—with*out* the "life." Tell Nathan the old man ain't up to it. God-a-minety, what a thing!'

" 'What a thing!' I says it to myself, out in the dark again. I can't put all that through Chatham, any way you figger, and I stand there like a woman, wringin' my hands. Then, 'Burt, you got to stick it a while longer, whether or no,' and I'm off for the send-in'-house on the run.

"Laws, but it's cold there! Ain't been a fire for a week. And something worse'n cold—course that's the one night the dang fuse has got to blow—dark. Dark as pitch except for every five seconds when a spoke of light come around outside across the mast and all them wires, and then it's like a flash of so much star-light winkin' in at the windows. And that fog-devil in the shack next door lettin' off a shriek and sendin' the chill up your spine, as if it ain't chill enough without. Oh, it's happy, happy!

"Never mind, I get hold of the wave-changer, throw her into seven hundred by the feel, and let loose the old spark. Then I got some light, don't fret! Ever see the juice workin' in the dark? Cracklin' blue willies

with green fringes on? Zip-zippy, and the shadows shootin'? Well, I sit there in the cold and fireworks and I begin to call—'BRI—BRI—BRI ——'

"After minutes it come back—'K.'

"I shoot: 'STANDISH ALIVE BUT TOO WEAK TO COMMUNICATE.'

"I shoot and I wait. The starlight on the aerials winks in the windows and the wind and the horn get under the shingles like the big bassoon, and I sit and shiver and wait. It's funny, but that's the first time I ever think any more about a radio message than what's under my finger or in my ear. And now I seem to see this one goin', goin' out, fightin' its way out through all that thick over the ocean and all the cross-currents and back-lashin's of static in the whirl of the clouds, feelin' its way to find that ship away out God knows where. And mebby it's because it get there mangled up—I don't know—but after a long minute come back a 'QTA.'

" 'TWO FATHOM DYING.' I cut the repeat down short. Another hush.

" 'HE MUST NOT YET.'

" 'MUST NOT YET OR NO.' I threw her back.

" 'COULD HE UNDERSTAND A MESSAGE?'

"Hell's bells, how do I know? I ain't God. Who am I though, anyway? My head's beginnin' to go round like a top. What on earth am I doin' here, usin' up navy juice on an off-length in private a night like this? Like a couple of thieves talkin' sign-talk in a

riot. Am I dreamin'? I am dreamin'—*nightmares! Whooo-r-r-rgh* begins the horn next-neighbor, and right in the middle the door opens, and what do I see against the whirl of light on the cloud but a figger comin' in. Sneakin' in, totterin' in.

"I don't know where I am, but I'm sittin' froze, and my thumb and second finger's tearin' out the long spark.

" 'STANDISH HERE NOW STANDING BY' (and my crazy hand won't stop) 'IN A BEDQUILT!' I shoot her. Was ever such a thing put into the air!

"Don't ask me how he come there. Don't ask me how, even given the strength in a pinch, he got out of his bed and his room and the house without Bangs grabbin' him (unless Bangs winked an eye). I only know what I think while I'm sendin', and him and his crazy swoopin' shadow there in the spark-sheets in the corner of my eye—him and his bare blue shins and a mountain of flowered bedquilt grabbed about him, and them lamps—nothin' but them two round goggles fixed on me hypnotic out of that gray plaster skull.

" 'He's dead,' that's what I think. 'He's gone and kicked in, and what I got is a haunt. What I got is a dead skeleton.' And sure enough I see a finger-bone come pryin' out of the quilt, pryin' out and pointin' out at the nippers over my ears.

" 'What does Nathan want?' His voice is thin as a woman rippin' silk.

" 'He's sayin',' says I, 'he's got three hundred-odd human souls aboard, not countin' the crew.'

"He come closer. I see him knifin' down slow into the other chair, but his eyes never leave me and his shivery finger never let me go.

" 'What does Nathan want?' His voice is like sand in the axle.

" 'He says,' says I, 'you was right and he was wrong, and now that he admits it, would you leave bygones be bygones and forget?'

"Never the bat of a purple eyelid; never a twitch to the whiskery skull. And his voice is like a dry diamond cuttin' dry glass.

" 'What does Nathan want?'

"I never 'take' like I 'take' that night, and I never will again. It flowed in my ear like readin'. I forgot I was 'takin',' I guess.

" 'He says,' says I, 'he can't figger how he come this far south. Engine disabled all afternoon. Got her goin' and made back north, he says; found water shoalin' at seven o'clock, figgered it Jericho Banks, turn northwest, found it shoalin' again, turn northeast, pretty soon same thing. Got anchors down now, but the tide's goin' and the wind freshens all the while and his cable's apt to part any minute and he can't see the ship's length and God help him. Uncle,' says I, 'do you make anything of all that?'

"Does he? Does a fish swim? He may be dead, dead and buried in a mound of bedquilt hollyhocks,

but yet they say the dead knows all. I see him there in the trick starlight, just the scaffold of his beak and them two lanterns showin' out. Does he understand? Does the conquerin' hero come? 'His minutes may be counted,' think I, 'but his years is comin' true.'

"Fourth time he ask it, and it's like the devil filin' his fork:

" 'What does Nathan say he wants?'

"I shoot and she come back jumpin': 'YOU KNOW WELL MILES.'

"The finger-bone's shifted, pointin' like a pig-jabber at my key.

" 'Tell him,' he says, 'take a soundin' for bottom.'

"It come on the hop again: 'JUST HAVE—EIGHT FATHOM SHELL AND SAND.'

"His voice is like the bite of the spark itself this time:

" 'Tell him this: tell him to break out that old chart I give him, and it'll tell him from his soundin'—everything—where he's layin'—what he should do—plain as the daylight. Tell Nathan that!'

"This is what I call fancy. This is 'sendin',' this is. What do I care, though? Send everything in the world now; send poems, send books. Code runs up my backbone and out my arm and never mind the headache in the morning. 'BREAK OUT THAT CHART I GAVE YOU ——' and so on, so on—and the blue light dancin' in zigs and zags and the skull there in the quilt-

hole suckin' its lips for the taste of glory—'TELL YOU EVERYTHING PLAIN AS DAY.'

"Dark and a hush. Nothin'. Nothin' but the bleat of the wind. It seem eternity I sit there, waitin', strainin' my eardrums into the pieces. Dark and hush. By and by it come, though, thick with static:

" 'THREE HUNDRED SOULS!' It seem to catch its breath. 'FOR GOD'S SAKE BOY!'

"It come out of my windpipe on its own: 'For God's sake, man! Look here, Two Fathom! Say!' I was half up and I could've wrung his neck. It come to me —in a black flash sort of—that thing out there—the dark and the waves and that captain——"

I can see it too, the picture he envisioned—the dark and the waves—the waves mountaining down out of the ropy dark, a giant heaval, a thunderous whisper—the cables thin as spider-stuff going out of the hawse-holes into nothingness—the dark wallow of the steamer's body—the pent hundreds, snoring in the security of ignorance or being innocently ill—the scud-cut gloom of the bridge—the underofficers shifting like the caged from cloth to cloth—the old man staring at the mouth of the radio-room speaking-tube, staring and licking his salty lips, swallowing his Adam's apple, sucking into his lungs a gulp of wind, pouring it out again: "*For God's sake, boy!*"

THE wireless sailor had my lapel in his fist.

" 'Say!' I yell at him. 'Look-a-here, you old devil!' I could've wrung his neck. He's all quilt, though, and

he never jerk when I grab at him, and—'He's croaked for certain now,' I thinks.

" 'WAIT.' I send, more for the spark'n anything. By the flash I see the smile still there on his mask, but his eyes gone glaze. And next I see the quilt come meltin' down onto the table-edge, and, 'That's the end,' says I.

"Then, lo and behold, I hear a voice, and it's like the wind in the neck of a bottle: 'Ask him what water he draws.'

"I ask, and the answer comes back like prayin' jazz: '26.'

" 'Where's the wind?' says Two Fathom in a dream.

" 'N by E,' she come.

" 'Is Nathan willin' to take my say?'

" 'He says,' says I after a minute, 'he says he is.'

" 'Very well,' says he, and I see he's gone off dreamin', dreamin' down at that filthy old mailin'-tube he's slipped out from underneath the quilt, dreamin' like a heathen at a whittled god. When he speaks again his voice is like another man—speakin' through a megaphone far away. 'Tell Nathan to get under weigh. Stand by to slip your cables. Got to lose what anchors you got down, no two ways, and if you ain't willin' to take my say ——'

" 'But he is,' says I. I read her out as it come back: 'STANDING BY.'

" 'Hey, wake up!' says I. He's off dreamin' again. He licked his lips.

" 'Get under weigh, run over your anchors, slip cables, steer to windward.'

"I shoot, and it don't seem more'n a minute before the spark is snappin' in my ear: 'UNDER WEIGH—CABLES SLIPPED—STEERING N BY E.'

" 'Steady as she goes!' says the old man. 'Steady as she goes!'

" 'Do I send that?' I wonder, and I'm just goin' to ask, when pop-bang she begin to go off in my ear:

" 'YOU SEND ME INTO BREAKERS—HEAR BREAKERS AHEAD—THREE HUNDRED SOULS MILES AND I AM BLIND HERE.'

"The bedquilt rears up at that. The dead has come to life and hellion mad. 'Souls or no souls!' he yell, 'I'm navigatin'. Steady as she goes!'

" 'STEADY AS SHE GOES,' the word come back, and steady too.

" 'When you see 'em breachin', sing out.'

" 'SING OUT WHEN THEY BREACH—SEVEN FATHOM NOW.'

" 'See them breakers yet?'

" 'CAN NOT SEE—YES CAN SEE NOW—GOD THEY ARE ABOARD ME.'

"The bedquilt goes up in the air like a cloud.

" 'Port helm! *Port helm!*'

" 'HELM APORT—STARBOARD I SWING—SHE BREACHES OVER MY BOW.'

" 'Steady on east by north!'

" 'E BY N E—SHE BREACHES OVER MY RAIL.'

" 'Let her breach. Steady as she goes. You're under a stone wall, Nathan. Hold her as she goes.'

" 'As She Goes—Ten Fathom I Have.'

" 'What bottom?'

" 'Gravel—Blue.'

" 'Blue gravel she is!' Two Fathom let out a screech, a thin, high, wiry one with a cackle, and I see him spirin' up pale in his night-shirt, shakin' the quilt like a flag. 'Blue gravel in the channel o' Finback! Blue gravel drift down off Middle Bank ledge! By the livin' Creator o' God! I can walk it blind!'

" 'Surf on My Deck as I Go,' I read it comin'. 'It Is Hell.'

" 'Hold her all the same, Nathan. Hold her steady till you fetch twelve fathom on yellow sand!'

"My hand slid off the key. The sweat's runnin' a river down my nose and for a minute I'm all in. Course the way I tell it you don't get the drag. You don't get the waits, and the waits was the worst. What I tell you so far goes like ten minutes. But you can figger the time. First and last, what I and the old man done that night—I got it from Burt and the compass-house clock—took from a little past two till near six. So you can see.

"No, but you can't see, neither. You can't see the strange sight of old skin-and-bones in the blue flicker, stridin' the floor in his night-shirt. Marked for dead and gone to glory, and carryin' on hell-for-leather all the same. You don't hear his voice like a megaphone

through the grind of the fog-horn and the rock of the wind. Dream-talk! Crazy-house! I can't make out what he's sayin' half the time, and it's always worse, and all I can do is sit there and send what I think I hear.

" 'Wear her!' he'll yell. 'Wear her now!'

" 'WEARING,' she'll come back.

" 'Hard up!'

" 'HARD UP.'

" 'Gibe, though!'

" 'GIBING.'

" 'God!' I'll hear him groanin' behind me. 'God!' I'll hear him prayin'. 'Here goes his sticks! Here they come tearin' out of him! Oh, God!'

" 'SQUARED AWAY—12 FATHOM ON SHELL AND SAND.'

"And 'God!' I hear him groanin', 'Hosanna! Praise be! Keep her full as she goes and none to the east! Let her bowl!'

"But you can't see it—not as I tell it."

I can, though. One thing, at least, I can see; a circumstance which eluded the imaginative grasp of my blue-eyed salt of the prairies. And this is that the man he called Two Fathom was sailing under white canvas now—no longer steel and steam. His eyes were on his sheets and halyards, his heart with his stays, his soul with his sticks. The genius of the fore-and-aft moved behind the veil, dominating the invisible event.

" 'Long reach on the beam now, Nathan. Easterly. None to windward!'

" '10 FATHOM GRAVEL.'

" 'Let her come up a half point!'

" 'HALF POINT—COME UP.' "

And so on with all the later fragments of that ethereal conning—a booming of duck and whine of hemp in the old seaman's mind.

The end arrived, as it were, without warning; one swift hair-prickling acceptance, ushered in by one five-syllabled report:

" 'SHOALING FAST—RED GROUND.'

" 'By the wind!' yells Two Fathom. He's crept close now and I feel it on my scalp. 'Sheet her home!' he yells.

" 'STILL SHOALING.'

" 'Hold her hard, the Footstone's under your strakes! Pull, boy, pull! Luff if you got to—but don't got to —make her if you can! What depth now?'

" '11.'

" 'And now?'

" '16.'

"And once again I hear the old boy groan.

" 'All clear now, Nathan. Steady as you go; all deep water to the other side of the ocean now.'

" 'ALL DEEP WATER—MILES I DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO SAY.'

" 'Say nothin' but good-by.'

" 'TILL I SEE YOU MILES.'

" 'Good-by.'

" 'GOOD-BY.' "

IT WAS now that the sailor fellow, fumbling his pockets, discovered a match, fired it, and blinked perturbed at the other's face.

"His eyes is glaze again. It's water. Ever see a skeleton weep?

" 'Unc,' I says, 'come out of it. You'll catch your death here. Come home.'

"But he's begun to wrestle my fingers in the dark, toward the key.

" 'Get Nathan again,' he says.

" 'Come on; call it a night,' says I, then something about the old geezer made me climb back on the key. I call, and I get him after a minute, bull-luck.

" 'Tell Nathan,' says Two Fathom, leanin' on my ear, 'tell Nathan I could have sawed off my hand that time.'

" 'AND I,' it come back singin', 'I COULD HAVE BIT OUT MY TONGUE.'

" 'All deep water ahead now,' says the old man in a funny whisper, and I don't know if I'm to send, but I send. She come back boomin' through the sky:

" 'AND ALL DEEP WATER ASTERN.' "

IN SOME ways I wish the sailor's story might have ended there. It would have made it a solider tale: what is more, for the weary, it would have let all hands out of the inevitable accounting, the swing of the

pendulum, the whole dismal business of getting the ancient mariner back, gale-tossed quilt and all, to his house, his astounded relatives, his smelly kitchen chamber, his bed of death.

Death-bed? No! No, indeed! The ember of exaltation burned still too imperious and too bright—too crafty and too bright.

"I seen it as I and Burt was standin' in the compass-house door, and the two of us bog-eyed with the night and all. I'm just tellin' him we'll divvy up the seven-to-twelve and he's to beat it to bed till ten—I'm just tellin' him, I say, when 'What's *that?*' says both of us together.

"It wasn't much. Only when you get used to a thing like a column of light, say, sweepin' always the same, night after night the same—the least thing that happens different is goin' to make you jump.

"Well, we wait and we stare, and another five seconds round come the next spoke over our heads, boilin' bright. And sure enough, same identical place out there in the gray of the cloud over the ocean, *whiff*, for the tenth part of the wink of an eyelid, she dip and she dim.

" 'Somebody back up there in front of the lens,' says Burt. He's around the corner for a look, and I'm behind him.

" 'Yep,' says he. 'Joe Bangs, prob'bly. Though that's funny, what's he outside the glass for? Leanin' there on the rail of the top walk-around?'

" 'It's—it's funnier than that,' says I. 'Burt, that ain't —— By God!'

"But Burt's off for the keeper's house on the run."

It does catch at the imagination, doesn't it? That swiftly swinging penumbral dimness athwart the ocean. That formless magnified shadow of man triumphant, cast "for the tenth part of the wink of an eyelid" against the dawn-grayed hangings of "them waters." Better than dying in bed!

"When Burt come back a little later he look more'n ever all in.

" 'It *was* the old boy,' he says. 'I just helped get the body down. How he ever get up that ladder nobody'll ever know. Hmmm!'

" 'Well,' says I, 'all over for Two Fathom, eh?'

" 'Yes,' says Burt. 'He got his Christmas present and gone.'

" 'By laws,' says I. 'This *is*, though, ain't it?'

" 'Christmas day in the mornin',' says Burt. 'And a merry one—not.'

"I set there thinkin'. 'Where'd you get hold of that?' says I.

" 'This here?' says Burt, pullin' the old mailin'-tube from under his arm. 'Pick it up outside the kitchen door. Funny stuff,' says he, uncurlin' the chart out of it. 'Always wondered where the place was at. Nobody will seem to say. Asked Bangs this mornin' and he give me the funniest look. The darndest funniest. Well, I s'pose we never *will* find out now.'

" 'Wait, though,' says I. I called Chatham on the wire and ask if they just happened to range that call of BRI's the night before. It's second habit to most. I'm in luck. Minute or two I hear it comin'.

" 'Plot this, Burt,' I says. 'Three-one-nine.'

" 'Must be some deep to the south,' says Burt. 'Got your own now?'

"I run a finger back over the pad. 'Plot this. Two-nine-five.'

"Well, I see what's funny before even I heard Burt whistle.

" 'Something rotten,' he says. 'These bearin's don't meet—nowheres.'

"There were them rubber plottin'-strings straddlin' off two separate ways into the North Atlantic—and there we was, starin'.

" 'Spooks,' says Burt. 'Spirit stuff. I never!'

" 'Neither did I!' says I. 'Never!' Then a wheel in my head begin to turn. I reached over and rub out that bearin' jotted on the pad—rub it off the record for good and all. Didn't want *that* followin' me the rest of my days."

"Why?" I asked the sailor. "What do you make of it? Spooks?"

"Well, you can let it go at that if you're one of them kind. Or else you can do what I done when Burt's gone—just what Burt should've done himself if he hadn't been so rattled—run out the converse bear-

in's. That's what the book says. Anyway, our storm-tossed *Ar'tic* plotted elegant that way."

"Where?"

"Boston, Mass."

"And what," I questioned the prairie seaman, "do you make of *that?*"

"Well, it was in next day's Boston paper in the ship news I see how the *S. S. Ar'tic* clear from the White Star docks in a snowstorm Christmas noon. So she must have been layin' snug in her berth that night before, eh? . . . I guess Nathan had kept that chart."

II

A LIFE

WHO can tell at what precise moment of genesis the soul enters into the flesh of a ship? But who can tell the same of those other creatures who are launched into the world to navigate on two legs in the image of God?

Indeed, there was nothing she could remember about this coming into conscious existence. She seemed always to have perceived the same objects about her in the same dim world. Without wonder. Wonder is the child of comparison, and the racing sloop, princess royal of the house, had never known anything beyond this unlovely jumble of the shed and yard. Sitting there on Number Three, the railway of the chosen of the house, sweet-smelling of all the priceless substance of her body, the thrice-tried woods, spruces, oaks, tropical teakwoods and mahoganies; the precious life-blood of trees given for her, gums and essences and black tar impenetrating the air with their immaculate perfumes; and the smell of oakum, and the faint scent of new cordage—sitting there on the high railway, gathering together day by day her strength and her aspiration and her beauty, she took slow stock of her surround-

ings, not yet conscious that the universe held anything beyond.

There were two worlds. There was the immediate, inner world, arched by a dark heaven, alternately noisy and still. And there was the outer, smaller world, all framed in the bright rectangle at the open end of the shed. There the iron rails which bore her sank down into a plain of meager water, edged with reeds and bosoming up a fleet of empty bottles, frigates of sawed plank, galleons of substance and origin unknown, a tattered armada which set sail on every wind from a hundred sawdust anchorages, bound nowhere.

Beyond the water there stretched a spit of sand. On it stood a solitary factory, perfectly bare, perfectly cubical, with a tall, cylindrical chimney rising from the center of it. Nothing could be uglier than that; but the sloop did not know yet what ugliness was. Neither could she comprehend its sudden, winging moments of beauty, such as the instant when the sun, sinking into the sand beyond, flung a scarf of crimson over the sky and cast a long deep-blue silhouette of the cube down across the tide-land running with wine.

Only when the wind came from that way she grew conscious of a large, formless discomfort. She seemed to be losing hold of something infinitely precious to her. She seemed to become less personal, less separate. That concrete cube was a fertilizer factory, and the wind from off the rotting fish sullied the breath of her immaculate body.

A dim suffocation of the spirit; a loathing unfathomable and unformed! It took shape only on that day when her pride was born. That day three gentlemen appeared in the shed. They stood gazing up at the satin arc of her flank and talking with one another and with old Witt, head of the house, who followed them in. And it was all about *her*.

They were not at all like the men she had known up to this time; the nimble-footed, greasy-jumpered jackanapes that were continually about her, ministering to the needs of her growing body. They carried no mauls or spoke-shaves. They remained at their ease; they too were immaculate. One of them, the stout one, had on a white waistcoat, credential of well-being, of authority, and of pride. Another, the tall one, kept pulling out his watch from time to time, as if the world were larger than the shed. None of them shouted, swore, or spat into the sawdust; none of them wiped their hands. They talked in assured, moderate tones. About incomprehensible things, setting fire to the imagination: "contract figures," "dates," "bonuses."

That was the syndicate.

They went away by and by, brought up in the rear by old Witt, still in that attitude of a strange respect.

That night, when the whistle had blown on the factory across the marsh, when the last flame had cooled in the sky, when, finally, the rising moon illuminated nothing animate save the occasional figure of the watchman passing across the door-space, a dark,

spare, coughing creature bowed down by circumstance —when all had gone still in the windless night—she lay there on the railway, half waking and half in a dream, setting her young world in order. She did not know what it was that she was putting together that night. It was a philosophy.

She looked at herself and found that she was good. She was so much too good for all those human mites who swarmed around and over her through the noisy days, rounding out the contours of her bows and quarters, polishing with incalculable patience the snowy reaches of her decks. Why, when so much as a single plank was ready to be fitted home, a very crowd of them had to come, bearing the fragile weight among them, and they joined it to her being with a slow, painstaking gentleness that was almost reverence, almost a kind of servility. That watchman, stooping across the spot of moonlight, he laid down for her, if not his life, at least the good he might have had of it. To these she was everything. To her, then, they could be nothing and less than nothing. They served her. In the mysterious scale of things they were below. In the mysterious scale she was above.

But with these black-clad gentlemen of the syndicate, with that white waistcoat, those pale, clean hands, those spotless boots, it was a different thing. To her, as to the gentleman with the watch, there was a sense of things to come, events momentous and large-horizoned. Being equal with these, she could serve them.

To them, and to them alone, she could show herself without shame; her beauty, her proud docility, her still latent swiftness, courage, strength.

Dreaming of these things, toward morning, a little wind came wandering over the water from the factory bins. Her soul turned sick. Her fastidious being revolted. A new anger flamed. Outrage!

It became intolerable that she should be asked to endure this. If only *they* were there again—they who would understand ——

THERE came the day of launching, when, not comprehending what it was all about, she saw herself surrounded in the twilight of the shed by a bright company of her human peers, mirroring in herself the soft colors of flags and flowers and fine gowns, the sheer white of linen, the sumptuous blackness of tall hats and trousers-legs. Where were all those greasy-jacketed fellows now, those sawdust-creepers with tousled heads and hard hands? They were there, but they were not seen. She felt herself magnified by that huge, concentric gaze. Exalted! Exultant! There was a woman, tall, crowned with an aura of umbrous hair, ivory-throated, carmine-lipped, gray-eyed. She stood poised like some waxen bloom against the trinitarian blackness of the syndicate. In her hand she held a bottle, deep-green and glittering, touched with silver. She lifted the bottle high, and the sloop felt the kiss of glass and wine.

"I christen thee '*Independence IV.*'! (And may you defend the Cup!)"

And as the voice went away the white boat felt herself wrenched out of the past of quietude and swept helpless into the glittering maw of immensity. A moment of travail; an instant of shuddering panic; a falling away; vertigo; and an emptiness! A tearing of flesh and spirit! An awful liberation! The long, cool, tumultuous caress of water, showering swiftly from one end to the other of her body. And then the miracle of motion! Her own dazzling motion! Careening, mysteriously sustained, between two skies, enveloped in crystal wind, transfigured with light, overwhelmed by space ——

Her gentlefolk were gone; the shore had lost its garden of colors. The workmen had her again, pulling her this way, guiding her that, making her fast to the side of a weather-grayed stage. Let them do as they pleased. They had had their day; their day was dying; hers was at the dawn! Her own had claimed her, and she belonged.

The color of the new world was changing. The rose of evening ran over her white sides and decks. The whistle on the fertilizer factory had blown. The workmen themselves had gone away, leaving her alone at last to gaze at the presence of her own mast, never seen before, lying beside her on the gray stage. How long it was, how straight, how sweetly tapering! Tomorrow they would lift it up, swing it inboard, step

it home. Her deck was already pierced to receive the spar; the strong, cunning timbers beneath it all crossed to hold its foot in step. To-morrow! She saw herself in anticipation complete, faultless, spiring ——

In the starlit darkness all the shore world had grown still. Nothing moved among the shadows but the slow shadow of the watchman. His footfalls alone disturbed the night. A man who was nothing!

The sloop, lying half in a dream, hardly knew when he came. He stood on the stage a long while, but to her he might not have been there at all. Except when, at intervals, he coughed. The coughing seemed to strangle him. Each spasm became something which tried to overwhelm and submerge him; something malevolent. It left him panting. The labor of his lungs was not pleasant to hear. It ran distressingly athwart the fabric of her sumptuous dreams. It was abominable. Why could he not take himself away where she would not have to hear him?

Abominable! Yes, sordid and abominable!

But the fellow did not take himself away. He moved nearer instead. She felt the almost imperceptible careen as his weight came on deck. She was forced to endure the shambling of his feet. From one end to the other, fore and aft, interminably, as if driven by some obscure, implacable power, marring the luster of her skin at every step of his hobnailed boots.

Of a sudden, unprovoked, he had cried "*Damn*

you!" and kicked her; a long, glancing blow, a savage excoriation.

She was dazed. She was really terrified. How could such things be? A wave of self-pity submerged her. If only the black water could have done the same! Anything! anything! to shield her from this incomprehensible, brutal, and contaminating violence!

The man's outburst had left him coughing. He fought it, shaking the deck with the struggle. Victory left him spent. He sucked for breath. His voice sounded weak and viscid under the stars.

"Done, eh? I'm done at the end of the week, am I? Chucked out into the gutter because I'm not good enough for anything else any more. And what now? What's to become of *them? Her*—and—*them?* God! God!"

He fell into a spasm of coughing again. But now, even while he coughed, he ran blindly up and down the deck.

He was quiet. He stood on the deck, staring down at the black orifice yawning to receive the spar. And as if the orifice were the boat's hearing ear, he began to speak in a level and awful tone of bitterness.

"And *you*," he said, "may you be damned to eternal failure too! May you forever think you're winning—and never win! May you be brave, brave as a lion, till the moment when you see a danger face to face, and then may the heart turn over in you and may you go down to a coward's hell! Like me!"

Abruptly, sucking his dry cheeks, he spat into the hole in the deck. Then he stepped to the outshore side and let himself fall down, untidily, into the black water full of stars.

The cry of the leper ran through all her being. "*Unclean!*"

She tried to stir on the water, to rock in the anguish of her degradation, to writhe. But the wind was dead and the tide slack. "*Unclean! Unclean!*" In the timbers of her heart she felt the dark stain of that man's spittle.

As the hours passed, stark with horror of herself, one hope endured. To-morrow, when they came, they would wash her clean. They would see; they would understand; and they would wash her clean. To-morrow!

But on the morrow, when they came in the white sunshine, they did not see. Swinging the great pale tree aloft and inboard, laughing, growling, moving all together, they lowered it home between the cunning timbers of her heart, sealing tight between wood and wood the dead man's curse.

There is no glory like the glory of a long lee water, a blue sky feathered with little clouds, and a reaching wind.

Wind and water!

There is this about the wind. It is a lover unap-

peasable and unwearying, a wooer perpetually renewed in youth; an Adonis forever escaping, a Don Juan forever tumultuously come. It is a kiss that can not be kept, abundantly given again. Reason goes out before the exuberant and faithless passion of the wind's embrace: one swoons to escape; one runs leaping to be taken. And always, running swiftly and more swiftly to the wind, one sings.

There is this about the water. The water is true. The water's is the abiding and sustaining love. Against the audacious ardor of the wind, the water flings the steadfast strength of continence. Above, the spiring gossamer reels and faints; below, the deep keel comes back.

Wind and water! To be at once bride of water and mistress to the wind!

To have the gift of beauteous swiftness! To drink of swiftness as one would drink of wine! Singing to the wind; quivering deep to the streaming water!

And then, when the "tuning up" is done, there is the lazy road home in the twilight, mainsail and spinnaker bosoming before the air, the sheltered water mirroring the cool, green sky, the low foreshore pricking out constellations of stars.

The voice of the stout gentleman with the white waistcoat hangs in the dusk above-decks,

"She'll do!"

"I guess she *will!*" That is the tall one with the

watch. He repeats in a tone of submerged satisfaction, "I guess she *will!*"

The third makes a happy, sucking sound with his cigar.

"Fast!" pronounces the tall one, and the stout one goes on, "Fast, I guess! A pretty thing—and fast!"

Life is good. The air is fragrant with the birth of night. The water curling back from the white boat's bows is bland and cool. A pretty thing—and fast! They have seen and known her beauty; they have sensed her swiftness, her exquisite and inexhaustible speed.

"And what do *you* say, Houke?"

That is Mike Houke, the sailing-master, to whom they appeal. Houke, another fellow with hard hands. A kind of an unavoidable human parasite, the fleshy end of a rudder. It is beyond her why they should ask Mike Houke.

His voice is heavier than theirs, and he knocks his teeth together between the words.

"Well—yes. But she hasn't got her neck wet yet. Pray God for a streak of weather before the trials, that's all. I want to see if she has the guts when she needs 'em, that's all. If there's a yellow streak, I'd like to know it first. That's me, gentlemen."

Yes, that is "him." That is like a Mike Houke. Indeed! *Indeed!* She lifts her pale shoulders out of the water. She is a little angry; a little hurt that they have not immediately cried out in protest. But per-

haps they understand too that it is too absurd for anything but silence.

Too absurd! Yes, surely, too absurd!

An uneasiness passes through her heart. What was that in memory about a curse? And a stain?

A fisherman anchored in the outer roads, a low-lying schooner as black as the night itself, emerges from the gloom ahead and passes silently astern. The following wind brings down faintly the reek of her bilge. And of a sudden it is like the old wind coming across the marsh from the cubical factory on the pit.

"*Unclean!*" That was what she had cried. She remembers how she tried to stir, but could not in the dead wind and the slack tide. She remembers the blow of that consumptive's boot; she remembers the fellow letting himself down untidily into the black water; she remembers what he left behind in her heart.

"May you be brave, as brave as a lion, until—until ——"

But, indeed, it is too absurd!

Yes, see, just here! The outer roads are passed; that slattern of the sea has been swallowed up already in the limbo of things to be forgotten; and in the silken gloom about her she sees herself surrounded and sustained by the pale company of the elect; squat sonders asleep at their moorings, dainty "class boats," sleek cruisers.

Too absurd! Too preposterous and too absurd!

Already she has forgotten.

There was something new in the wind; an unknown heaviness. Before it and above it cloud-banks drove to the west. There were some who said that the trial (choosing at last the Defender of the Cup) should be put over. There were others who said it was as fair for one as for another. Moreover, while the boats had yet been jockeying for place, shying, curveting, wheeling in swift, expectant sweeps upon the line, all had still been blue and white and gold. Now the smother on the horizon had come up and obscured the sun, which escaped only in rare blades of light, cold as sabers striking far off on metallic seas. Even here on the reach, still under the lee of the headland, it grew choppy. Seaward, the gray of the water began to be thin-streaked with the lighter gray of spume.

The sloop ran under single reefs. The wind was not the wind she had known, the laughing and audacious lover of crystal days. And yet, as yet, under the lee of the land, there was something lifting and exultant in this pitting of her strength and courage against the gray mood of the wind. To seem to yield, and, laughing in all the choral note of her cordage, *not* to yield! To bow her head before that overweening presumption; leaping forward, lithe, flashing, illusive, to rise again! To sing aloud! To fling back the challenge in a song!

From first to last it was the wind that was her adversary, not the other boats. She saw them from time to time, but without much emotion. Away on

her weather quarter was a sail, snow-white, with a big black "5" painted on it. That was the Boehdler boat. She had heard Houke telling the black syndicate that the Boehdler boat was going to be "a hard nut to crack." Well, Houke might see the Boehdler boat now if he cared to look—coming on astern. If, being astern, she was at the same time up-weather on a fairly close-hauled reach, what matter? Never mind! As for the others, they were all out of it, astern and in the lee. Nothing to bother her in that quarter. There was still the Boehdler boat. But never mind. It wanted only another tiny added draft upon the reservoir of her inexhaustible speed. She would win. Yes, she *was* winning. Moment by rocking moment she became the Defender of the Cup.

She was brave, "as brave as a lion." She looked the terrible wind in the face. Already the others had slipped from memory. It was the wind she raced. It was the wind whose dark onslaughts she parried and turned straightway to the profit of her tumultuous white progress toward the open sea.

Into the open sea! The long bulwark of the land which had sheltered her was going away. What difference! The wind was no heavier here. Evading its blows, she swayed aloft again, and all the voices of her cordage sang her high defiance against the wind. Sustained by the deep, true water, she could never be anything but brave; the deep water of the sea, heart of faith.

But what was happening to the water, here in the open sea? Where was the water gone? The continent and incorruptible bridegroom had turned incontinent and corrupt. She felt all the water of the sea suddenly going away, letting her fall down with an oblique and sickening motion into the abyss. And over her to windward, abruptly, she saw it lifting its head. The gray-green face of the water, streaked with spume, distorted, malignant, stood with the terrible face of the wind.

Then the heart turned over within her; the deep vertigo of panic laid hold of her. She felt herself overwhelmed. Floundering and helpless, she felt herself spewed out, flung away toward the sky. Giddiness assailed her. And again, again, she went swooning down and down into the abyss.

Fright stirred old instincts. From somewhere within her came the cry to luff, to bring her head up to meet the wind, to spill out of her sails that crushing burden of air, to take the seas against her least dimension, bows on. And quickly! quickly!

Gathering all her terror, she tried to writhe about into the eye of the wind. And she could not do it.

Why? In her fatal need, why could she at last not do what she wished to do? Her panic deepened. It was that fellow, Houke. Houke, the ignored, the unavoidable parasite, the fleshy end of a rudder, had presumed to mastery. He had made himself gigantic. She felt the iron pressure of his hand, the brutal im-

pact of his will. She heard his voice lifted above the wind and sea, cursing her with oaths, foul and incredible.

"Come on, you luffin' bitch! Come on, you stinking white coward, you! Lay to it! Lay to it, I say!"

She fought back. He grew more gigantic, like some inconceivably horrid Old Man of the Sea clamped to her flesh. She saw it now. She was being sacrificed. Self-pity submerged her. Her beauty, her strength, the grace of her swift body—to be thrown away! It was wanton and intolerable. Deserted by all, and left to Houke! She, the heiress of all the generations of the beauty of ships! She pitied herself with a deep and piercing pity.

She revolted with the power of despair. Her sudden will was fiercer than Houke's will. Shaking her shoulders clear of the water, she whirled too quickly for that malignant helmsman. For an instant she felt the weight roll off her canvas. Lifting on the coming wave, she had a blurred glimpse to windward. She saw boats going by, two of them, three, four; the Boehdler boat with its black "5," like a scar, far in the lead. She saw them, but they did not see her. Booming along in showering arrowheads, lying down snug to the breeze, they looked neither to the right nor to the left.

Where were they all going so intently? She had forgotten. But let them go. Let her lie to for a mo-

ment! Let her get back her water-clogged breath! Just for a moment so! Please!

But Houke's voice was heard, like the bellowing of a baited animal, choked with anger, scarcely making coherent words.

"You *will*, will you? You *will?*"

The whole length of her fabric was racked by the savage rudder-thrust. That brutality was too much. That pain was too heavy. A sudden, complete weariness took away her powers. She let go; gave herself over into his hands. Swinging off, her way half dead, she accepted on the broad side of her canvas the full torrent of the wind.

She went over slowly. The white cloud of her canvas approached nearer and nearer to the horizontal plane of the sea; already water swirled over her lee deck, licking in tongues. Through the veil of her acquiescence she seemed to hear the thin echo of a voice.

"*—And may you go down to a coward's hell—like me!*"

A dazzling pain, like a blow! An electric agony! A crash! A sudden liberation; miraculous ease! She lay between life and death. It was her mast that had carried away. Of all that dragging torment, mast, spars, stays, and canvas, mercy had swept her free.

Spent; naked; rocked in peace! The water could no longer harm her; it came and went without terror, passing over her face in soft veils, luminous with the light of the returning sun. Where she went she neither

knew nor tried to think. Let be! Simply to lie there, rocked in the long, long swing of peace.

Once she looked up to see above her, hanging black against a tumbled sky, the side of a steam-yacht, with smoke standing out from its upper edge, like a soiled pennant. From the rail people gazed down at her. She saw the black syndicate framed conspicuously among them, gazing down with hard eyes. The wordless one of the three, planted between the other two, was being ill.

She saw them again that evening. They came and stood on the landing-stage in the basin where a tug had brought her to be tied. They stood still in the same order, the wordless one, a little pallid, between the others. And so they gazed down at the weed-strewn thing that had betrayed them, their honor, their glory, and their pocketbooks as well. They had been "done," and they were not the sort who are "done."

They were all silent to-night. Their resentment and disdain were too deep for speech. The tall one looked at his watch, and, still in silence, they turned and went away into the bright town.

Then came Mike Houke. If she had betrayed them, what had she done for the professional sailing-master? He descended to the stage, dull-footed, his hands sagging his pockets. He seemed tired, as if to gain this tryst he had made long detours through deserted streets. His face was red. Like a red moon of malice,

it hung over her in the deepening night. And like the others, he too was silent.

His lips opened but once. For the second time in her life, at the hour of ebb, she received the bitter and disdainful farewell of an expectoration. Then Houke too was gone into the bright town, by darker streets, leaving her alone.

Lying under the icy stars, she tried to think out the reason for that swift, baptismal failure. And if she found the reason she needed, who is there among us to cast the stone? It was not a failure, after all: it was less a failure than a kind of triumph. For if she had turned sick at a thing which seemed only workaday to her sisters, then it was because there was something in her, some finer strain of perception, some more poignant pulse of life, some imaginative fastidiousness which was not in them.

Yes, a kind of triumph!

She had not been understood. No one had seen her as she really was. Not even those black-frocked, pale-handed gentlemen of the world.

So it went that night, under the remote and icy stars.

Have you ever been in prison? No matter. For even in the straitest cell one can take a cramped step, move an arm, lift the head. What must it be then for a creature that has known the joy of running swiftly through space to lie motionless forever, strapped in a wooden cradle stuck in a bed of mud?

For it seemed forever. It seemed as though, failing, she had been forgotten of men and of water and of the blue god of ships. Only the wind remembered. On glittering Winter nights the wind came mocking and would not let her be. It ruffled with merry, malevolent fingers the weathered sail-cloth stretched like a tent over her dismasted deck; it whispered with a saturnine gaiety of the surf of the far, lost sea. It laughed and went away and came again, laughing, and would not let her be.

Time died with dreariness and became bloated and immense in death. She lost track of the days, the weeks. Almost she lost the memory of the sea. Even the muddy estuary serving the yard was hidden by a shed. On either side she was crowded in by hulks like herself, upon whose blistering presences she looked with a heart-eating disdain, as upon creatures with whom she should not have been asked to share even a prison. Shabby boats broken with work; snub-nosed boats that towed things; somnolent, pot-bellied, middle-class "slow-coaches" of pleasure-boats that bumbled through the Summer Sundays of tradesmen with enormous families. The only place she could keep her gaze was straight ahead, where a naked plain of mud (wet or dry with the weather) ran to meet the sky, broken only by a single embankment, straight as a ruler, upon which a trolley-car ran back and forth, interminably, green as a beetle in the sunlight, streaming yellow-eyed across the night. Marking incorrupti-

bly the dreary hours. The dreary hours that ate her up, her heart, her strength, her youth, and her incomparable beauty.

Sometimes people came to look at her. At least, in the search for boats, they sometimes paused in the mud to give her what they called "the once-over." At such times, hating her prison as she did, she would have clung to it. In her soul she shivered. The kind that came were not the kind with whom she could have gone. She knew it by their hands and faces and their heavy attitudes, but mainly by their clothes.

Not till they had passed on in their calculating search for boats could she breathe again. Even their pursed lips, their amazement, their exclamatory "Whew! I guess *that's* a price for a boat now!" gave her no joy of pride. Not from them! Or perhaps, after all, it did leave something behind for her starved spirit to feed on in the empty days.

At least, if she were worth enough money to confound these muddy-footed passers, then somewhere there must remain the knowledge that she was still priceless: there must be something, some one, yet to come. Some one with yet whiter linen and yet paler hands; some one with the grand manner; some one who would know her through the shell of a failure which had not been a failure at all, but a kind of triumph. So, thinking secretly of this, she slipped back again into the immense vacuum of time.

Only by rare intervals, in the darkness of the night,

moved by the moan of the wind and the distant whisper of breakers, creeping memory brought back the stain of that dead man's spittle, still lying black in the heart beneath the broken mast.

The light of dawn returned at last; the buzzing trolley-car turned green again like a beetle, counting off the hours of eternity.

She lost track of the months, the seasons. She felt herself fading. She pitied herself because she was growing old.

Would nothing ever happen to shake the awful weight of time? Would no Prince come? Was Sleeping Beauty never in this tale to be freed from sleep again?

On a glowing, Spring-struck day three people stood before her, and one of them, the lady, cried, "It *is;* it's the *very boat!*" and clapped her hands softly, making a glint of rings.

And the bound sloop knew her, remembering the kiss of glass and wine. For it was the same umbrous-haired and ivory-throated woman of the christening.

"Oh, but we must, we *must!*" she was crying with an imperious delight. Her husband, carried as always by the gust of her desires, looked at the boat. Her husband's friend looked at *her*. He made aimless patterns in the mud with his stick, and to the other's "Might cut for a schooner, shouldn't you think? She'd do for cruising, properly, eh, Gail?" he murmured. "Yes, yes, indeed," distractedly.

"But yes, yes, yes!" sang the woman with the carmine-tinted lips, and all the while she clapped her hands.

The spirit of the boat went out to meet them, as out of a weary land. In the graciousness of their presence it began already to bloom, as it had not bloomed even in the rich black presence of the syndicate. Breeding tells. Blood calls to blood. She felt the Spring air winding her with the breath of flowers, like garlands for them to see. She loved this woman, white-skinned and slim as she; she loved already these never-troubled men. The bindings of the cradle held her, and yet of a sudden she felt herself free.

They were at work again, the smelly, blue-jumpered swarmers of the dust, and, like the sun-dial of the copyists, the green trolley-cars counted none but shining hours.

She was still the same person, and yet she became another person, as a maid turning woman. In her new guise, two-masted, she was less spiring and capricious; fuller-formed, more glowing. Her comeliness had come of age.

They called her *Helen*, after the woman. And if, when she took the water again and moved away from the mud of bondage and into the azure spaces of the bay, breaking out bit by snowy bit the cloud of her canvas—if then she had never heard of another Helen from the past, yet in her she knew the bloom of a full

loveliness for which men may die and cities find themselves betrayed.

Life was sweet in the broad, blue, sheltered harbor behind the islands and pillars of the sea-gate. It was sweet and more than sweet to come back out of exile and find herself in the shining company again. To feel them all about her, the cherished fleet of a humankind that never hurried, never worried, and never spat. Just this was incredibly fine. To lie there all the days, buoyant and wind-swung. All the nights, hung effortless between two multitudes of stars, watching the nearer stars of the town—the gay, bright town, the laughter-murmurous town, the town of no trouble—from which at length the muffled launches came arrowing across the stars. To sense the infinitesimal careen of Dick's and Helen's home-coming over the side; to hear their voices, unemphatic and peaceful, floating in the night. Or the voice of Dick's friend, Gail, who had just "seen them aboard" and was now going back ashore, "in a minute, you know."

Sometimes the "minute" grew long. Sometimes Dick, the husband, leaving the others together on the after-deck, came wandering toward the bows, pausing here, shifting aimlessly there. Going, he went nowhere; looking, he seemed to see nothing. Never did he say a word. And if, obliterated by the night, he lifted his arms in a gesture, like a man in fever warding off some fantasmal blow, it could not matter after all. It meant nothing. Nothing could mean any-

thing dark in the life of these men and women who commanded life. Here there could be no scrambling and striving, no trouble, jealousy, pain.

Dick was tired; that was all. That *must* be all.

"Helen," he said in a curious voice, when Gail's minute had come to an end, and the two, husband and wife, stood alone at the break of the companion-way, "Helen, I'm crazy to get to sea. I—I want to tear loose. I can't wait to see how she carries herself in a breeze. Besides, I've got to be in Boston about those papers by Friday at the latest. What do you say to to-morrow for a getaway? Shall I tell Ayward it's to-morrow, Helen? Dearest?"

"Yes, by all means, Dick. To-morrow. Only—well—you know there's the Eddie Franklin's party to-morrow night——"

The schooner, listening, knew that woman. She, alone, seemed to herself to catch what that meant: "Why should we trouble ourselves to go when we're already happy here?"

From the first the boat had loved that ivory-throated woman with the red lips and gray eyes. They knew, these two.

Yes, why? Why hazard the gamble of change when life was already complete; when the days walked swiftly under the sun; when the upper and nether skies of night held already all the stars, added to all the myriad stars of the mirrored town—and the gracious companionship of white boats at their moorings,

and the thrumming launches, and all the company of a humankind without fear and without reproach? No, better a hundred times let sleeping dogs lie. The sleeping dogs of change; the sleeping dogs of the offshore, of wind unbroken for a thousand leagues, of rain and squall and sleet, and of water sinking away into the abyss!

No, the two white Helens knew, better than the man. Rebellion stirred. She and that woman would not go. By strength, wile, subterfuge! There had somehow come a covenant between them not to go.

And so, when the morning of Friday came (the last day given to Dick to be in Boston), and the sailing-master was told to clear, revolt was already dry for the spark.

By strength, by wile, by subterfuge!

The woman, standing motionless by the taffrail, said nothing. The schooner seemed to do nothing. But somehow the chain of the mooring-cable had got itself fouled with a ring-bolt in the stem. It took time to clear that; iron was jammed in iron with an obstinacy beyond belief.

It took time, the heavy breathing of seamen hanging like blue monkeys to the bobstays, the whispered oaths of the sailing-master, and, at intervals, the voice of the owner himself, raised in inquiry and protest. He paced back and forth on the fore-deck. He would not be still. He could not be still.

The sunlight bathed the harbor in a flood of peace;

a wind blew, but it was a warm wind. Everything was visibly well with the world. And yet through all this amplitude of the morning there seemed to have run a sudden ethereal fluid of conflict. No one could know it: but the boat knew it, the woman knew it, and the man, driven stiff-legged about the fore-deck, knew it.

His voice snapped, as if in this electric air his vocal cords had gone brittle.

"My God alive, Ayward! Look here, now!"

"Aye, sir. Only a minute now, sir!" And down the other side of the rail the sailing-master's whisper began to tumble, "You numb-fisted lubbers, you; look alive with that chain! Knock it clear, I tell you! Only don't part it! Take care, don't part that chain! Damn your souls!"

The woman, poised like some pale and indolent bloom beside the taffrail, had not moved or spoken.

The white boat lay helpless in their hands, docile, almost somnolent, her mainsail flapping idly in the wind. By strength, by wile, by subterfuge!

The pacer on the fore-deck dried his brow with a handkerchief.

"Now, Ayward! For the last time ——"

"Aye, sir! One minute more. Listen, below there; hell's going to pay in another shake. Knock 'er clear, I say! Care! Lord's sake, man, don't part that—*God o' Mercy, the fool's parted that chain!*"

Yes, abruptly, with an almost imperceptible lift of

her shoulders, she was free. In that basin full of moored craft, her mainsail half slacked and no hand on her wheel, she was as free as the bull in the china-shop of fable. Answering eagerly to the crowding of the wind, she drifted slowly and less slowly astern. Swiftly and more swiftly. Down into the thick of them.

Blow! Blow, wind! Blow now! Who cares?

All things were vivid in the instant; the mirrors of little waves dazzled; the sunlight was a blinding inundation. Color, motion, confusion of sounds! Loveliness and fragility running amuck!

Ayward's feet were pounding the deck.

"Lay aft, all! Alive, all! Mainsheet! Ease off the main!"

Again, as once before, her whole flesh was racked by a rudder-thrust. She felt herself whirled gigantically off the wind. What matter now? That man's ferocity was her triumph. She had the storming fellow in a corner. Falling off to starboard, she grazed the quarter of a frightened yawl. But there was another to come, a dozen others on that course. No, he had to bring her wearing all the way around—bring to, and across the stern, the full power of the wind.

"Stand by those sheets!" she heard his voice in a high, thin trickle of words. "We gibe! Now we gibe!"

And gibing, like a blown cloud, the mainsail swept across the stern from starboard to port. In the instant

there was the blow of its fetching up, the stunning jerk of the sheet, the crash of wood. And half the main gaff-throat came tumbling down, this way and that through the rigging, and lay on the deck.

Her wing was broken. It sagged absurdly in the wind.

By strength, by wile, by subterfuge!

When they had her snugged down at last to an anchor, the woman said quietly to the man,

"That's beastly, Dick. You'll just have to take the train now. Or motor. Perfectly beastly. Take a motor, like a good boy now. Yes, yes; till to-morrow then; good-by, my dear."

It is pleasant to rest in the weariness of triumph; to bear a little wound for victory and to sleep, half-waking, and dream. To dream away the length of a sun-drenched afternoon; to dream the sun down, the stars up, the town (that was to be taken away) awake once more with all its thousand eyes of festival. To watch the gently swaying shadows all about of pleasant boats. To hear their bells, all together, near at hand and far off in the velvet substance of the night, telling the hours as they pass away, like a slow river. To hear, or only half hear in a drowse, the sunken beat of launches coming over the floor of stars. To dream deeper and deeper into the soft depths of the night!

Awake! Awake in the dark! Blank, staring, shattered! What was that? Its echo still runs away, like a handful of dried peas flung among the crowded hulls.

Again the night splits open. That is a shot. Two pistol-shots! Delivered implacably into the body of the night!

There is no sound, no outcry, no groan. Only, on the after-deck, there is the slow impact of two weights tumbling down.

Footfalls come forward, each foot dragging itself heavily after the other. Their passage from stern to bows is like a troubled theme borne on the awakening tumult of the harbor.

Calls, far away! Interpolations bawled into the unanswering dark! The scurrying thrum of launch-propellers.

From above the bows comes the voice of Dick, the husband, who should have been in Boston, not here. He is speaking in a tone monotonous and bitter.

"May God damn your soul! *Helen!* I called you that because I thought you were like Helen, and I didn't know how right I was. If only you'd have gone straight to-day, when I wanted it, and got us out of this rotten hell ——"

The rest runs off into silence.

The confusion of alarm draws near. A launch butts its nose against the side. Many feet are on deck.

Again, for the third time, there is the sound of a pistol-shot, muffled this time, for the muzzle is buried snug in the clothing over the man's own heart. And the body of the husband comes crumpling down to

heap itself very slowly on the deck, soiling the fair white planks.

She was now definitely under a cloud.

She was completely bewildered. The whole tragic episode remained incredible. She perceived a result, a horrid, culminating violence; to take that and exhume its buried causes was beyond her. Everything was warped and shaken; nothing was clear.

Certainly *she* had done nothing. At least she had not *meant* to do anything.

During the days which followed there was only one thought which stood out by itself, the thought of the stocks. The fear of being sent back again to the prisoning cradle, the mud, the green tram-car, the creeping hours and years.

Was there no one to stay it? Would no one want her any more? Of course, of the right sort. Of course, rather than the wrong sort, she would take the cradle in the mud. Quite of course. But taste is, after all, a luxury; the nicest discrimination begins by and by to show the wear and tear of circumstance.

Even in her own spirit she began to lose caste. Like the woman who has known better days, and now is brought to the first secret and awful glance into the market-place of the street, so now she began to think in terms of the best she could get.

Or, finally (not to blink it), of anything she could get. *Anything!* Anything but the stocks.

She was bought. Bought suddenly, unexpectedly: paid for in spot cash, without quibble. Her joy bloomed like a garden that is a little dusty. Having dimmed her eyes against the worst, she made haste to embrace the illusion of a miracle.

Had she imagined she was going *down* in the scale of things? Indeed! And all the while she had been going *up*.

For where in all the epoch of the syndicate, in all the time of Dick and Helen and Gail, had there been boots shining like these four gentlemen's boots? Where cravats so rich, watch-chains and signet-rings so abundantly golden?

Where had there been red lips so red and eyes so darkly large as the lips and eyes of these ladies? Not Helen's, surely. Where such gowns? Or where had there been such a fulness of laughter?

One's tastes change. Inevitably. We may call that growth. There is a time when one is pleased by a reserved utterance, by a brief lilt of laughter or a smile. But after all, looking back, there is nothing authoritative in low speech, and a smile gets nowhere in the way of mirth. No, for authority give us a big voice, a wide gesture: give us a long, loud laugh for mirth. And after us the deluge!

Down? Ha-ha! Not *down! Up!*

For at last she had found them who are without care. No mistake this time. With these coruscating creatures there was no thirst for change. They had a boat,

but they did not bother to go anywhere; not further, at least, than a mile down the harbor, where, under the southern head of the sea-gate, they had gained the incomparable benefit of being alone. Even the few remaining jackanapes of the crew were sent ashore for a holiday on the launch which had brought out all the baskets of things to be eaten and the cases upon cases of things to be drunk.

Quite alone, as befitted.

The night grows late. The lights of the town are dimming; the tame lights of the unadventurous town. In the upper basin the yachts drowse at their moorings, circumspect and spiritless, immaculate, well-bred, pampered, sheltered. Sheltered even from the full, wild gale of life.

"*For what care we* ——?"

The thick, gay, inchoate melody comes out and hangs in the starlight.

Yes, what care we? We, who have become the ravishers of joy, free-booters of time and space, wild gods!

"*What care we?*"

"*Here's to wine—dee-vine—that brings us joll-i-tee!*"

Yes, yes! To touch with greed and caresses the white bosom of Life! To drink Life, laughing, to the bitter dregs, like wine!

Down in the world? Ha-ha-ha-ha! Laughter shakes her from the deep blade of the keel to the mast-

heads swaying blue in the light of stars. *Up! Up* where none can follow any more! *Up* where the crimson gods are! *Reeling up!*

In the fabulous night one of the men had come above-decks. As once the coughing watchman's feet, and as once the husband's, so now this man's feet came forward along the boards. But the watchman and the husband had carried black hearts; they had looked into the face of death. This was another man. He looked through the veil into the impossible face of Life.

One would scarcely have guessed it in him. His Creator had not clothed him in the flesh of knight-adventurers. He was a fat man; even a gross man. His huge cheeks were surcharged with blood, his eyes blurred, his collar wilted open at the throat.

He breathed heavily, as he walked (in naval parlance) "on various courses." But in his heart blossomed the incredible flower of Romance.

He stood staring down at the bitt about which the light anchor-cable had been hitched, not too carefully, by the departing seamen. He nudged a bight with his boot-toe. It came free in an easy coil.

And then it was that the heart of Romance spoke.

"I'm Chrish'fer C'lumbush."

He leaned over, tugged another bight clear, lost his balance, and sat down.

"I'm Chrish'fer C'lumbush! Queen Ish'bella, greetings! Greetings—and—farewell!"

With a fumbling enthusiasm he cast off all the rest

of the cable, freeing the schooner abruptly from the anchor which had held her against the outflowing river of the tide.

"Chrish'fer C'lumbush, tha'sh me! Queen Ish-bella, farewell. I go dishcover 'Merica—land of free—home o' brave!"

The tide took hold of the white hull. Gathering in from all the reaches of the harbor, it converged upon the sea-gate, sucking like a mill-race. It bore her along without effort and without care, across the waters, across the stars, bound godlike into the unknown. To scour azure seas that never were; to find some gleaming Eldorado, " 'Merica"; to lift the loom of some fantom "land of free," some legendary "home o' brave."

To sweep onward, outward, trailing a muffled, unsuspecting melody athwart the sea.

"*For what care we* ——?"

What care we? *Down?* Not *down! Up!* Reeling up among the gods and stars! To drink Life to the dregs, like wine, and be drunk with it! And after us the deluge!

It is curious that no shadow of terror fell across this tippled glory of hers till, just outside the headland pillaring the sea-gate to the south, a rock came up from the blackness underneath and stabbed her in the side.

And there, blind with fright, leaving behind her the tiny screechings and flounderings of two-legged things,

she went down slowly through the water of the sea and came to the bottom and smothered and drowned.

HAVING drowned in the shallow sea, all consciousness did not immediately go away. Sometimes, in a blue-green light of torpor, she seemed to see things and hear things. So she heard the long breathing of the ground-swell on the sanded floor.

So she saw, against the cool luminosity of the ocean's roof, the flight of fishes, a huge press of squid shooting endless across the sky, an iridescent, cruising shark, sleek mackerel in wheeling convoys, rainbow-herring, cod with big shoulders and drooping jowls sailing in slowly to know the why of this shoaling water. Creatures translucent and formless drifted past her on the drowned wind of the tide, creatures shimmering with fantom jewels, creatures burning with dead flame. Once a stranger thing came toward her over the floor. It was that fat man who had set forth valiantly to discover a "land o' free," fatter now, but not so red. He came and went away again at the oddest, mincing gait, his back up, his head cocked inquiringly to one side, his hands and feet just giving the sand a fillip from time to time.

Sometimes booming clouds passed by (not too near, for she was marked already as a pest, with a spar-buoy overhead), and those were the bottoms of boats and ships.

She felt the abiding cold of the sea, but it no longer chilled her.

Now and again, when the tide was low, her topmasts emerged from the water into the sunshine and dried a little, but she felt no warmth. Time became nothing. The flight of fish, the streaming coverts of weed, grew dim. The long breathing of the groundswell was harder to bear. Shadows ran together slowly, and, colliding, made one shadow.

She was dead now. The water of the sea, striking her slowly through and through, had washed her clean at last of everything, of life, of memory, of pride, and of fear; even of that old stain which had lain like a scar in the timbers of her heart.

She did not know it when the twin clouds of two keels came to rock for a long time over her head, where the spar-buoy was. When a mummy came down at the end of tentacles to look at her with one round, enormous eye, she did not see him. She felt nothing when iron hooks were sunk into her flesh to pull her up.

WHERE was she? What was she? Who was she?

Lying on a makeshift railway above a strange beach littered with fish, an unknown harbor before her and a queer little crouching town running up behind, she became aware of an existence and an identity. She took account of a new world, recollecting nothing of the old.

There was an old man with brown wrinkles all over

his face and silver rings in his ears and a grizzled mustache drooping to his shirt-collar. He wore ancient overalls faded to the green of ocean shoals, and most often his feet were bare.

There was a younger man, his son. He had shrewder eyes. Brought as a boy from the Azores, he was already a Yankee; sometimes he wore a white collar, and he called his father, "You Ginny, you!"

There was yet a third—John, son of Frank, grandson of old Francisco, a brown-eyed, red-cheeked, tousled baby, forever in peril of life and limb. John was here! Muffled shrieks from women (other babies' mothers, for he had none of his own). John was there! Men's voices lifted in warning! Saints called upon. John had fallen off the dock! Lost, gone, drowned! Mary, Mother of Grief! But no; here was John, after all, found in the cuddy of that queer new boat of his fathers, eating up a piece of *linguiza.* John could eat anything.

That boat on the railway, which was not like any other schooner in town, loved Francisco and John, the baby. Toward Frank, the son and father, his feeling was more of anxious respect, an awe born of self-doubt. From the first she had had a sense of her own unworthiness in Frank's eyes. He was too shrewd.

"What kind of a vessel's *that* to go fishin' into? You Ginny, you, now look what you gone and got me into!"

Even the old man's half-sheepish championship was

not enough to reassure her. Looking out over the harbor, she could see the right kind of boats coming in from sea; sloop-rigged draggers, heavy yawls with seine-boats in leash, power-dories trailing lilac wakes; all of them strong-shouldered and fair-girthed. No, she was not like them. She knew it. Out of the unknown she had come up to this birth bearing the sad gift of slenderness and fragility.

She could not get away from it in the daylight. She thought of it in the morning when the sun rose from the sea and breakfast smoke drifted down, blue and clean, to mingle with the stench of dead fish that always sickened her; why she could not say.

She felt it at noon, when the whistles blew on the freezers and she saw the women waiting for their men in the doorways; indomitable red Yankee women, full-bosomed Islanders, dark, old wiry women from Lisbon in black shawls. Why was it that she was not, and could never be, like these stolid and unconquerable women?

What was it in her? Who was she? From where had she come?

In the dusk of evening a breath from the fish stranded on the tide-flats blew over her and made her a little ill. Why? She could not understand it. It was like an echo of a sound she had not heard, and it troubled her and she was ashamed.

It was only in the night, when old Francisco came prowling like a thief to rest his shoulder against her

bow-planks, stroke her gently with his palm, and ramble on with his queer talk, it was only then that she could be comforted. For then he told her stoutly that she was a good boat—"a good ves-*sel*, yessir!"

"My Frank, he eez good fisher*man*, on'y he don' known a ves-*sel* same as I do; no, sir!"

No, Frank did not go out in the night to talk to wooden boats.

"On'y you wait. My Frank he tak' manny feesh. Then he see how fas' you tak' them feesh for market. Because I known you. I see you got that line. You go to sail lak' hell-damn; I known that, yessir."

Yes, truly, she would sail like "hell-damn." How different she felt now, in the night, to the mumbling of this old brown ocean-creature! For him, for Frank, the master fisherman, for baby John; for these three of hers she would sail like "hell-damn." Surely!

"You eez not the same as these other ves-*sel*." The ancient wagged his head, making the silver earrings shine in the faint light.

No, she was not. But now she would be. Because she had not been made so stanch as they, she would make herself stancher than they, blunter, more resolute, more imperturbable.

The old fellow bade her good-night and shambled away among the shadowy houses. He was a queer one, certainly; never at home but with the sea, his lifelong enemy, and with boats. Perhaps a little daft.

He did not seem queer or daft to her. Even left alone now, the dream of puissance carried her on.

Yes, she would be stancher than they. Truer than they, and braver. Brave as a lion. Why "lion"? What was a "lion"?

Echoes! Those bothering echoes again.

Yes, but she would be stanch and blunt and gross.

A late moon rose, and all the dark houses that had watched her with bright, skeptical eyes became white houses watching her with black eyes. A wind came in, heavy with the corruption of life and death, the stench of things that propagate themselves and die in shallow waters, the emanations of clams, the fetor of sewage going back to its mother, the sea.

And now she would not shrink from it, but took it like an obnoxious draft. Fiber by fiber she felt it impenetrating her being. She surrendered herself. Under the pale, high moon she felt herself growing swiftly gross and strong and lush, struck through and through again with the primeval nastiness of the beginnings of things, earth of earth, brine of brine.

Wrapped about by the silence of the sleeping town, she felt herself held in thrall by a curious exaltation.

Dawn was making. Out of a hill-street two men of a weir-crew came stumbling on sleepy legs. They paused beside her to light their cigarets, and she heard them talking.

"That Frank Prada—I guess he ain't numb—gettin' himself stuck with *that* to go fishin' in."

"It's the old one put 'im up to it."

"Yes, mebby; but how Frank could've went and actu'lly done it! How's he goin' to get clear? That's somethin' like a debt to get saddled with. And where's it comin' from, I say? Fishin'? Say now, Joe, honest to Gawd, can you imagine *that* comin' acrost Ninefathom Bank with a breeze o' wind in the nor'west? Can you?"

"Gawd, I guess *not!*"

"Down good in the water with a bellyful of haddock, and a *sea runnin'?* What?"

"Gawd, I guess *not!*"

"Well, I guess not too!"

THE dawn grew. Where were her stanchness and grossness now, in this growing day that laid her reedy nakedness to view, "thin and pine?" Where were the dreams gone of the night?

"Only," added the first man as the two moved on, "only, if anybody in town *could* get anything out of her, it's that Frank himself. You know that, Joe. That Frank knows fishin' and he knows fish."

There was a wisp of comfort; something to go on through the pitiless day. If anybody could make anything of her, it was Frank. And when night came again, Frank was five hours dead and already cold as carrion. Nobody's fault. He had been in collision with a timber on some down-shore wharf; that was all. It was sad for his father and his son, they said. None of them said anything about his boat.

They dumped her into the water on the day of the funeral. That was what her launching amounted to. Francisco and little John were not even there. She saw them go by on the front street, the old man shuffling forward with shoulders bowed, rain running off the brim of his Sunday hat, and amphibious white gloves magnifying his hands. Behind him towed little John, damp, sneezing, and full of awe. In that dismal air, following his grandfather and the mud-spattered hearse, his tiny head twisted farther and farther around, owl-like, to keep her with his eyes—his bewildered baby eyes. As if she, the helpless, could help! And then for the first time something seemed to go out of her heart and run to take hold of those two trudging survivors before they vanished in the sad cloud of rain.

Sounds projected themselves out of the dismal vacuum. A dozen fellows began to bustle about her. The loud, dull, repeated blows of mallets! A giving, a crack, a sudden, horrible disadjustment!

"There, get to hell along with you! Go baptize yourself!"

And as she fell away in a long, giddy crescendo of motion, the memory of another existence came back to her; vividly she saw again the hundreds of blurred faces of gentlefolk, the flower-banks of stuffs, the colored bunting aflutter in the wind of the yard. She seemed to hear the faint, re-echoing cheer. She felt

the kiss of water, the caress of the bridegroom claiming the white bride. She knew who she was, at last.

Who she *had* been, rather. She turned sick to see who she *was*. To see herself not white any more, but black and dismal as a shoe. Not buoyed between the twin blue skies of heaven and sea, but afloat on a gray, fish-strewn water under a dome of muddy cloud. And in place of the red sheds of the house of her ancestry, only a drab foreshore sticking out at her the brown, deriding ribs of ragged wharves.

It was all ghastly and intolerable and wrong! It was nightmare!

The hands of strangers, slippery with salt and old fish-slime, were making her fast to a beer-keg buoy. She could have screamed. Didn't they know who she was?

They left her chained to the beer-keg in face of the dripping, crouching town, and she could not save herself. She, the heiress apparent of the kingdom of the loveliness of ships!

Night came. In the weeping void she set herself to recover the past. Scattering street-lamps blurred through the drizzle. Oh, but that was the town of no trouble, thousand-windowed on sky and sea. Ill-smelling shapes swayed all about her in the dark. But oh! oh! those were the sweet white yachts of gentlepeople making a bulwark around her. Desperately, as the night grew, she summoned bright memories. A black memory came.

A coughing fellow stumbled back and forth over her body, marring her with his hobnailed boots. *He was going to kick her* ——

She tried to writhe, to escape and throw down the dream.

But no, she was awake, and yet there was some one. Under this alien night she could feel upon her the weight of a human burden.

Two human burdens. The survivors, Francisco and little John; the baby asleep under the old man's coat, the old man holding him loosely and staring into the dark.

Well, here they were. She had wanted the right people; women of joy and light, men of possessions. This Francisco was a man of possessions, then. For he had three things—a child that wanted living, a debt that wanted paying, and old bones that wanted rest.

He seemed to recollect himself, held the child closer, and began to croon an Island song that went, "Bye, bye, bye: bye, bye, bye!"

It was all too inexpressibly sordid.

Now she felt the contamination of his spotted hands, stroking, as if absently, her wet planks.

"Look here, now, I an' you we got steek together; we got look out for this leetle John, I an' you; ain't that so?"

No, no, no, no! A thousand times no! What in

the name of a jackanape's heaven did he think *they* could be to *her?* To *her?*

But they were going. She felt the old creature letting himself down over the side into a dory; she heard the creak of oar-locks, the diminishing wash of blades, the whimper of a half-waking child.

She was free of them; rid, for a moment anyway, of that sniveling baby and that sore, ignorant, ragged, old, presumptuous man. And then an incredible thing happened. In the rain and wind and midnight the strangest onrush of loneliness.

Oh, come back! Come back!

In all her exalted, futile life, she remembered now that no man had ever said to her, "We must stick together, you and I." Many gentlepeople had admired her beauty, her "yachtiness," her speed. No man had ever trusted her; no man had ever loved her before.

Oh, come back! Come back, little John, and balance yourself in peril on my bow-sprit, as you did in the golden days ashore. And let me see that you do not fall. Soft, laughing, warm-bodied baby of mine! Come back, Francisco! I am nothing! I am everything! I am the wife of your despair, the mistress of your forlornest hope. You have loved me with a seaman's love. I will do anything, be anything. I have been a queen, and I will grovel! If only you will come back!

It is hard to chronicle the days and months of her novitiate, when she learned the way of the sea. For

a long while she was half this, half that; half humiliated, half exalted in devotion; half presumptuous, half afraid.

Once, for a moment, she was whole-heartedly afraid. It was the day when they took her out for her baptism of the sea.

"No, sir!" Francisco had stuck to his guns of faith. "You watch; that eez good ves-*sel!* You watch!"

"We'll watch, all right!" they assured him ashore, squinting at her, and then wisely at the weather outside, and then at the crew of human castaways which the old man, in league with their necessity, had prevailed upon to "join up" with this derelict which no other man would trust. "We'll watch! And we'll see her drown'd you good the first sea she takes, come clear of the Point."

So she knew, from first to last of the shameful exhibition, that she was under the observation of distant and cynical eyes—that they saw her, at sight of that first oncoming sea, veined with weed and spume and struck with the look of an evil, remembered face—that they saw her break into a nervous luff and dip her weather-bow and bury herself under a thunder of white water.

It was drowning her again, striking her down again to her death! Through the catastrophe she heard the pipings of that harlequin crew, drenched, battered, heaping her with thin curses. Blind with panic, she felt herself going down and down.

"Et eez notheeng! Notheeng!"

It was that absurd old man, Francisco, calling out to her. *"Notheeng, notheeng! Now we come clear! Nobodee hurt!"*

And there, miraculously, she did come clear; shaking off the water, she rode over the high range of another wave. Not dead. Not even so much as hurt.

He had understanding enough to let her lie as she was for a bit, head to the seas, canvas spilling the wind. He had the tact to make a great to-do about the trim of the foresail. As if it had been all the fault of the trim of that foresail!

And very gently, choosing his time on the falling of a sea, the daft old fisherman brought her around once more to take the weight of the wind.

A wave broke white on the lifting plane of her bow, rushed showering along her waterline, streamed away beneath her counter. She took the following vale at a rush, trailing a wake of pearls.

Nothing! Nothing, Francisco! Nothing ever any more!

How can one undertake to tell of all the things she learned? Or of how, in the pride of the faith of a man who loved a ship, and for love of a boy who was let come out on a harbor noon and play helmsman at her unmoving wheel, she grew day by day less harassed and complex, grew in the end as simple as the child and the man? Until she carried but dimly in memory that dead existence of pride and niceness and

facile disaster, of yachts and gentlepeople, of white and blue and gold. Until, even, lying one dusk in a strange harbor-entrance, she saw a fantom of gossamer coming in past her through the channel, a Defender home from a trial spin, and felt not so much as a prompting of wonder at the way fate had turned back upon itself. For it was she that was the sea-slattern now; it was *her* breath now that sullied the air for gentle boats; and she neither thought of it nor cared.

She was conscious of two emotions only—one a simple-hearted wonder as to what it must be to be as beautiful as that; the other, as she swung on the tide and headed out once more into the mysterious night of ocean, a saving disdain.

For what could that fragile, winged creature do for herself if it came to that? Could she tell by the feel of the ground-swell changing weight beneath her keel that the sea bottom began to shoal? By that and by nothing else could she go out and pick up Nine-fathom Bank in the blackest hour of the blackest night? Or could she sail herself by the wind for hours at a time, with no man at the wheel? Slatting and filling, trusting to her own resources, keeping watch and ward of a three-mile dory-line flung out in a foggy dawn?

That last query showed the simplicity of her new heart. For really she could not do that yet herself. The old man had tried to teach her. With all the power of his faith he had tried to carry her through. With all the power of her love she had tried to carry

herself. It was no whim of his; it was need, his and hers and baby John's. His crew was barely filled; only enough to man the eight dories she carried, no "spare hand" aboard, and for a cook a one-armed, one-legged mulatto, good for nothing out of the galley. Of course Francisco was a fool to put to sea that way. When the dories went overboard to set their trawl in the dark of a morning, it left him to all intents alone with her —to watch out of her, for himself, and for the scattered boats. Had there chanced to come a squall of wind ——

Well, but he and she had a boy ashore, and they had a debt.

It is an awful sensation to discover yourself of a sudden adrift in the wind and the darkness without a helm—to feel your helmsman letting go the wheel, walking away, leaving you to go it blind.

It was never quite so bad while Francisco stayed on deck. Still she could feel the moral support of his presence and the light of the oil-flare he "pottered about" with, jumping monstrously from sail to sail, and making her look like a stage-flame streaming in the void. Still she could hear his voice, "You look out now, that weend! You come up a leetle bit."

Yes, but she was coming up too far, much too far. All her cloth began to slat. Her spars rolled and banged, racking the sheets. Too far, too fatally far. Rolling and racking and banging! Help! Just one

little thrust of the rudder, as you love her, to help her catch the wind! Help!

"Now, look here, you better come off a leetle bit, what?"

Come *off?* Heavens, yes! But how? Bang! Bang! Roll and quiver and roll! A hundred reef-points spanking in panic. If only once she could catch hold of that tricky wind with her head-sails!

"Now you come off, see?"

And somehow she *had*. At the last instant she had caught the wind with her jib, with her staysail: not knowing how, she was struggling back, recovering her lost balance, gathering her lost way.

No, it was not so bad while Francisco stayed on deck. It was when he went below, taking his flare with him, to test her—it was always then, sooner or later, that she broke. At first there was a fearful exhilaration, the sense of fighting the invisible wind and the long black seas. But then, washing along through the blind gulf, she began to wonder where she was going; her speed became incredible and perilous; of a sudden she felt herself running her own boats down in the night. She seemed to feel the egg-shell blow of a dory under her breast. And she was lost. She had veered to the lee. The torrent of the wind bore her down, broadside on. She felt herself going over, crushed, stunned, blind—over and still further over to fall into the sea.

Gasping, she felt Francisco's footfalls. And now,

in the blackness, the touch of his hand on the wheel, the haul of the rudder pulling her up.

It seemed to her if he had said anything then that she could have hated him with the hate of a devil and a woman. But he said nothing, and with a rush her heart gave itself up. Ancient, wind-beaten, sea-caked, his flesh corrupted by ages of labor and disasters, she loved this man because he laid his hand gently on her, like a caress, and said nothing. Not even, "Next time!"

Gazing to the eastward, where the dories began to show like spider creatures against the dawn, he said to her instead, "Feesh! You got some feesh to-day, old girl! Look them dories, gun'l's down with feesh! You see that?"

She saw. They began pulling in to her as she trundled past, bringing a rainbow wealth, big gleaming cod, gray haddock, bright-spotted cats and little fish as red as blood; a triumph of fish. But still she had to look beyond them to where her fleet-sisters loomed against the sky: the *Rosa Deutra*, quite near, lifting her white pyramid from out the dark brood of her dories; the *Swift*, farther to the east; the *Esther and Robert*, hardly more than a cloud-wisp in the south. And even so far away as that she seemed to catch the gesture of their disdain.

But if she felt it here at sea, it was at market that she suffered really the weight of their scorn. Crowded in the basin of the Fish-dock, bowsprit to mainboom,

rail rubbing rail, gossiping as boats will that have come up from hard tricks at sea, she saw herself overshadowed and despised. She was the butt of solemn raillery.

"A fine night last night on Big Round!"

"Yes, a fine night and a grand tide for the set!"

And they would look down at her, bound between them, and study with gravity the marks of havoc that that heavy night on Big Round had left on her fragile body.

"And a grand morning to run in. I came from High Land to the lightship in three hours, wing and wing."

"Three hours for me too. I carried away my foretopsail and never knew it, it seemed so easy on the wind."

Again their unruffled gaze would dwell upon her, and she would have sunk out of sight to the bottom if she could. For she knew they had all seen her limping in, hours behind, reefed and mauled, thankful even to save herself from the huge east wind. And she could have wept then, for herself, for her man, Francisco, and for her baby John. For she seemed to know now that she could never be like these big and virtuous sisters, with their strong bodies, their imperturbable spirits, and their hearts of oak.

But once it was different, and it was like heaven at last. That day had been calm, the ocean a blue mirror. And out of this breathless dome her arrowy hull had come drifting an hour ahead of the fleet; for

an hour she had lain alone in the basin; for a good hour Francisco had had the market to himself.

It was that evening, when all the racket was done and all the trucks and buyers gone home; when even the skippers and crews had climbed up and slipped away through the gate to the city, and in the crowded basin the vessels had fallen to their gossiping again.

"You know those ships the children make of shingles on the beach?" It was her neighbor to starboard, to her neighbor to port. "Well, this was a fine day for shingle-ships, wasn't it?"

"That's right. As for me, *I* wasn't built for *drifting!*"

And then from beyond, where the old *Flora Silva* lay in the pack.

"Stop that and leave her alone. You can talk, but, all the same, give the little one a light weather and she can sail circles around you, and around all the rest of us, come to that."

"That's a fact," from farther off; "I remember one day ——"

"Yes, and that night off Monumoy, remember, when we saw her by moonlight going to the northward in a dead calm ——"

She was amazed. It was like a cake with candles to a child. To find all her tiny lost moments of virtue recovered again in the memory of the fleet! All those obscure and fugitive triumphs which she had thought no one ever saw. To this new-born sense of election

and camaraderie everything glowed. The illumination of the night city beyond the dock became pyrotechnic; a triumphant conflagration.

And again she could have wept, this time for pride, when Francisco came down late through the gate from the city and stood on the dock above the vessels. For Manta, skipper of the *Swift*, and the Big Driver, *Deutra*, were with him, and the three of them stood arm-in-arm, like "killers" all.

How indomitable he looked of a sudden! How favored! How young!

He had found her in the depths and brought her up; and now this was what she had done for him. It was partly the light and partly the distortion of her own triumph. But how young he looked to-night!

He was not young. He was old, and he grew perceptibly older day by day. There was no blinding herself to that. Now that all seemed in a fair way to coming clear, one thing remained to wear him down more than the others put together. This was the boy, John.

It became awful to him to have to leave that boy ashore. And awful to her. What did Francisco and she know about those people with whom John had to stay? How did they treat John when she and Francisco were out of sight? How did they feed him?

Once, coming home after a big trip to the Georgias, they found their baby with a purple bruise on his cheek. The people said he had fallen down. When

the old man had him out on board to question him he turned either sullen or scared and would not answer.

How she hated to go that time! How desperately she would have liked to stay and to keep that soft, beloved mite all to herself through a hundred sunny hours, tumbling about the dory-nests or playing grave helmsman from his high perch on the wheel-box! All alone, out there in the safety of the harbor!

It wore on the old man and it wore on her. It was always between them. She felt it lurking behind all his interminable ramblings of words at sea, when he could not sleep at night. He remained on deck through the darkest hours, even with the crew aboard and a watch set; even in the rain. Always talking. About everything in his world. About the wind which he had fought so many years. About the sea, his lifelong enemy. How she should never make peace with the wind or sea, for they would not keep it. Or with the fog or the tides. Only with the lights.

Once when he had been going on so, his voice broke off and his weight bumped down without warning on the deck. For a minute it lay there as still as death, and it was terrible to feel. It was almost as terrible to feel the quiver of his fright when he came to himself and peered about to know if the crew had seen him.

And then it all came blurting out. Was everything all right with John? What was John doing now? This minute? There are so many things that can

happen to a four-year-old baby. Just in a minute. Any minute. This minute now as well as any other.

But after all it was better that John should be ashore on good ground than out here with them, pawns of water and wind. When they thought of that it made them cold. They knew that neither of them could have moved, if John had been out there with them.

And yet was he all right?

It came to a head one day when they were leaving the home harbor for the grounds. John had come off from shore, as always, to be bidden good-by, and whether he had gone back in the bait-boat or the store-boat no one seemed to know. He had got away, at any rate, without his good-by.

So it had come to this, that he, Francisco grandfather and father in one, and she, who felt herself the only mother little John could have, were not allowed to know when or where he had gone.

Francisco would have held up his departure, had it not been for his crew. She felt with him the awful pull not to go. But there was something else, and they had the sense of it in their bones. Somewhere a weather was making. If they were to get fish to feed that devouring debt they must make what time they could. A run for it, a single set, a quick market, and back on the day after to-morrow to put their hearts at ease about that boy who had been spirited away without saying his good-by.

As she passed out that afternoon on the long button-hook course from the harbor, around and over the shoulder of the Cape, she tried to defend herself against the growing uneasiness of them both. For the first time she tried to fight Francisco off, for his own sake, and she was frightened when she found she could not do it quite.

Putting High Land astern at dusk, giving up the shore and entering finally into the sea-run, she felt herself encompassed by the threat of some obscure disaster. The familiar water seemed to turn unfamiliar, and she thought strange currents touched her keel. The moon hung with a luminous ring about it, like a halo.

No, no, no! She took herself desperately in hand. She looked hard at the moon and saw it riding clean; rank on tranquil rank the waves marched across the ocean before an honest southwest wind. And the men were singing because the night was fine.

They were baiting their trawl for the morning set; their big knives beat in measure on the bait-boards, and to the measure those castaways lifted an Island song. Then, a little abashed, their voices trailed off to hear Francisco's coming up among them, and the old man went on alone. It was an old song about a girl, a rose-garden, and a white wall blue in the moon.

Peace came to her at that. Francisco could not be worrying any longer now, or else he would not be singing that song in the moonlight, after so many years.

She gave herself up to the sensuous joy of the open run. She felt the miles sweeping away. Her body, molded fine like the body of a violin, sang back to the booming of the seas. She knew her way. She caught the submerged ground-beat of hidden banks and knew them and named them, passing to the north and south. A mile on her lee-beam two big Gloucestermen reached along with her for the grounds, and hour by hour in the moonlight she held them fair. And Francisco Prada, who had vanquished the old sea and the wind, sang on.

Midnight was gone. The feel of the little hours was in the air. The wind had died. A metallic clarity lay on the ocean. She was on Nine-fathom Bank; the Gloucestermen to the northeast of her becalmed in deep water.

Having no wind, she could not drop her dories; they had to row themselves away to their stations in the long line. The last two were gone. The squeak of the thole-pins faded away. Everything was still now, save for the occasional tapping of the cook's peg-leg on the galley-ladder and the rare thump of Francisco's boot-heels knocking gently against the wheel-box.

Why did he not talk to her to-night? Had the westering moon cast a spell on him and taken him a thousand miles away where she could not have him? Had he been lulled into forgetfulness by this tranquil

interlude—forgetting even little John himself as the hour of peace slipped away?

It was out of the end of this hour of peace and silence that the voice obtruded. Tiny! Astounding! A faint, awakening wail of fright, muffled by the blankets and ditty-bags cast in behind the ladder in the afterhouse. A preposterous little smothered complaint creeping out of the companionway.

After a long moment, listening "with her heart in her mouth," she heard Francisco say, "God 'ave mercy!" After another moment she felt him getting down from the wheel-box, stiff-legged, like a man treading where there might be tacks. He did not seem to have his wits about him. Her heart cried to him to do one thing first: go down below and tell the bewildered stowaway where he was. But he did nothing of the kind. He was like a man who has no time: a thousand things to do and no time to do them.

God have mercy! Little John was here!

Yes, she told herself, but John was all right. Quite all right!

Yes, yes. But it was appalling! Appalling beyond any reason of words. John! That baby who had laid his cheek against her deck and gone to sleep, one day on the railway ashore! Who had played stagecoach with her fore-halyards for reins that other day! Who had struggled gigantically with her wheel while she nosed about her mooring to please him on a sunny noon! Memories whipped her.

There was something queer; a sort of optical illusion. She saw herself growing very small; the magnitude of a pin-point on the ocean. Or else it was the ocean itself that grew vast, pushing back its horizons.

John was here! But what of it? Give her another hour and the dories would be swarming home; she would be manned; then she could meet anything. Anything. Only an hour more.

What was that bewildered Francisco up to now? Trimming all her sails with Herculean efforts of his wasted arms! She felt herself close-hauled—in a dead calm. Why? Ask any one but that old man. Why had he got that cripple up out of the galley? What did he want him for? Ask any one.

And what was this that she heard the cripple saying?

"Will y'u give a look at that there glass, Cap'n?"

It seemed a minute to her before the old man opened his mouth.

"Eet's broke, that's what."

"Broke or no, a half-hour ago that barometer stands high, and now the bottom's dropped out. Great land o' God, but what's that bawlin' like a kid below, Cap'n? Great land o' God ——"

But Francisco did not answer.

"I want them dories in," he said instead.

"Then call 'em in. Here, Cap'n, where's that fog-horn? Give me a hand at that fog-horn and I'll call 'em, *I* will!"

In the soundless, windless hour of moonset, under the pumping of the cook's good arm, the varnished box gave tongue. The awful wail rose up and spread around. An endless wail with a beat in it. A tide of gigantic complaint. Hunting out on the broad, empty floor of the ocean the scattered dories.

When it broke off it left a gulf.

"You see anny one, w'at?"

"No, it's gettin' too dark, Cap'n. Unless that's one of 'em on the beam there—yeh, they look to be pullin' this way ——"

"You see anny one?" the other repeated, like a deaf man.

And then she heard something else.

"Gran'pap! Gran'pap! Gran'pap, 's that you?"

John had got his head out of the companionway at last, into the one surviving ray of the moon.

It seemed to throw Francisco into a rage. He waved his arms and cried, "Sssh! Hush!" And to the cook, "God's sake, get beezy with that horn!"

Again the horrid alarm rushed forth. She heard it pouring away over the black, glassy sea, "Hurry, all of you. It's little John!" She felt it bellowing about the ears of all those little hidden dories, "Cut the trawl! Let the gear go and pull for it! Pull! Pull!"

Under the enormous outcry she felt something the others had no time to feel. She saw the lower stars all around the horizon going out like smothered candles.

She became aware of weather lifting up all around the calm; a visible stockade of wind.

One other thing she felt. The minutest circumstance. It was this. The mainsail hung amidships; the slack Manila line of the sheet sagged down on deck, falling in a single loop. In this one casual twist of it was planted the peg-leg of the cook, at work over the horn. She felt that, and under the whirlpool of sound she felt her own helplessness.

Would he not move it? By thought? By accident? Now? Or now?

In the blackness she felt the thing coming.

It struck her in a puff on the starboard beam. The mainsail, caught broadside on, banged to port. Banging, it fetched the Manila sheet taut with a twang, like a banjo-string struck with the thumb.

There was no perceptible shock or effort about what happened. The cook, caught by the peg in the snapping loop, simply lifted a bit in the air, whirled once over, and, surrendering to centrifugal force, vanished in a high arc over the stern. And the horn was still.

At first she could only wonder how her canvas and gear had held, and how long it would. She was whirled in a single sweep to meet the wind. She sailed, lying flat over, rushing at an enormous speed. The drag of mast and stays seemed to be tearing her slowly to pieces, opening all her seams. She was choked with a sudden cataract of rain.

But where was Francisco? And where was John?

Out of the sightless chaos she tried to get back her attention. And she felt Francisco writhing gnomelike in the dark, groping, creeping. He had hold of the baby. He was crawling back to the wheel-box. Awkwardly he was setting his will to a vast undertaking. That was to tie himself with a length of line to the box, holding the boy between his knees. The rain ran level like a flight of arrows. Never had the man seemed so clumsy, so altogether bootless and inept.

Under the continued stroke of the squall the sea began to make. It was a confused sea, uneven, crossing, blind, like some wild improvisation. Still the pressure of her canvas held her on the rack, tearing her flesh, fiber from fiber. She did not know which way she went, north, east, south, or west, but she felt the weight of the man's hands on her wheel and so she sailed, driving at a crazy angle up the wind.

Thoughts flitted starlike through her mind.

Where were the dories? How ever was she to find again her eight lost dories and her sixteen castaway souls? And why had her man nothing to say to her? She was sailing as no boat could sail, all lowers set in a squall, leaping blindly into the wind. The wind was killing her, but she sailed, and he had no word. Even the little boy, clamped between his knees and staring wide-eyed into it, was still. And again, where were the dories?

The wind was gone as suddenly as it had come. For a moment, lying there sore and spent, she heard the

lees of the rain beating straight down in the calm. The backwash of air took her in another moment from the other side, whirling her about. As she plunged away up this new wind it came clear, and she saw the lights of dawn striking up the sky.

"Gran'pap," she heard the boy crying, "look how pretty there!"

Oh, little John! Her little John!

And her dories, too. She was going back to them, straight and true. She could begin to see them now, here one, there another, miles ahead, beaten, waterlogged, hugging their little lives. Far in the lee loomed the twin feathers of those two Gloucestermen, hove to. But she would need no Gloucestermen this dawn to pick up her dories: she had come through and she could do it all alone.

She drove up under that fierce, clear wind, into the very center of the broken dory-line. She saw boats on either hand, the men standing up and waving their arms. It was time now to luff and heave to and wait.

It was time now, Francisco! Breath by breath, with a growing uneasiness, she waited for those hands on her wheel to move over, swing her up out of the wind, and bring her to.

Time, Francisco! Time *now!* Another minute and it would be too late. The dories were going by.

The dories were gone. Those heavy, inattentive hands on her wheel had brought her sweeping straight through the middle of the line, and on and on. Be-

hind her the waving arms in the boats grew small. The wondering hails sank away. Not knowing why, she had committed the blackest crime of the fishing-grounds and deserted her dories at sea. She and Francisco. For from the first to the last Francisco, hunched on the wheel-box, with his hands gripped about the spokes of her wheel, had turned his face neither this way nor that; not once had he raised his voice in an answering hail. Staring straight ahead of him, he let her go driving on to the north and east, out toward the open sea.

Why? Her world turned dark because she did not know why.

It was John, the baby, who saved her then.

"Gran'pap," she heard him protesting. "Gran'pap, wake up!"

So Francisco had not meant to do it. He had not known what he was doing. He had been asleep.

And now, as the morning grew, another calm fell, and the child slept. He had gotten away from the old man's knees and lay on the deck by the house. As she rocked hour after hour in the quiet, sunstruck fog, she could feel his warm little weight there.

This Francisco of hers must be very old, to have to sleep so long. In the quiet under the yellow fog she had time to think. The sense of her own weariness came to her. She was more than weary, more than ripped and battered. She, too, was very old. It came to her as a discovery. She was old; old in

years, as a thin-built boat counts years; old in wear, in wisdom, and in her spirit. Like the man who had taken her to be his own. Of them all, only John was young.

"Look here now, I an' you we got steek together; we got look out for this leetle John, I an' you; ain't that so?"

It came echoing out of memory.

It must have been noon now. Afternoon.

The fog-curtains wavered, bothered by a slow tide of air. They broke. There came a strong wind laced with rain. She lay on the port tack, keeled over, conscious of the pain of an effort that was too much for her, now that she was old.

Where was she going? She could not see the sun, she could not tell the bearing by the smell of the wind as she could have done in the abounding assurance of her youth. Was she still heading out to sea, or was she carrying John straight against the peril of the Cape, lying in a long, hungry tongue of sand all to the west of her?

But Francisco must know. He was sitting there, staring straight at the compass-needle in the binnacle. And he must be awake now.

John was awake. She felt the abrupt pattering of his feet. She heard him crying, "Gran'pap, you got to wake up!" She felt him trying to remove the immovable hands gripped about the spokes, begging, "Let me be cap'n, Gran'pap!"

An old panic came to take her, and she tried to fight it off. He knew she could not sail herself. He knew she had never had the character to keep her own head alone. And still he slept. And the wind grew and the seas. Putting her whole heart to it, she strove to remember all the little rules of "by the wind" he had given her, the little tricks of give and take, the desperate niceties of balance.

And still that panic grew, fight it as she would. What if this; what if that? What if, in some one black instant of inattention, she were to take one sea a fraction of a point wrong? She could feel her bow dipping under; she felt the gray crest coming over, sweeping aft, licking around the house, darting at the playing baby and carrying him away over the stern. Francisco, for God's love, wake up and take hold of him! John, for God's love, go below.

Below? But below she was taking water. She became conscious that it had been seeping in all that day through her opening seams, and now it washed along her keelson, fore and aft, like some creeping disease of the spine, numbing her faculties. She was so old, so old! She had to take care of that baby of theirs while the other slept, and she was so old, and so death-struck. She did not know where she was or where she was going on that wind that beat her under the clouds. And she felt the water deepening in her hold.

The clouds broke in pieces quite suddenly and the wind drained clear. She saw the sun going down to

windward, on the bow. She saw a wall of land. She saw a light that winked and went away and counted five and winked again. High Land of Cape Cod!

"That there's your frien'; don' you forgeet it!"

How many times had he told her that? Francisco.

For a space her age slipped away. Age and triumph have nothing together. The illusion of conquering youth swept her. She had been the pawn of the wind, bound over to go at a given angle toward the wind wherever it called her to go, and under cover of the clouds the wind had played her fair. All through the afternoon it had brought her to the north and west, up out of the ocean, a long diagonal to clear by a mile the northern shoulder of the Cape. She had been helpless, and yet she had brought the helpless within sight of home.

She grew exultant; she seemed actually to gather speed. Bathed in the green glory of twilight, she could have sung aloud to the babe and the sleeper.

"Look, John! Wake up now and look, Francisco! The back shore! High Land there! And beyond High Land the harbor and the beach at home! Another minute now and we'll come about, down into the bay and home!"

And in that moment of exultation she suddenly saw and understood. And she grew old again. She heard the sardonic glee of the wind; the wind that had mocked her, that had seemed to play her fair, that had

brought her so nearly to the end—only to laugh at her now.

For she knew, and the wind knew, that all alone she could never bring herself about; it was beyond her powers now to bring her head across the wind from the port to the starboard tack for the course down into the bay and the harbor at home. With those slumbering hands on her wheel she must go on forever as she went. She had won the Cape; she must lose it again; see its blinking eye pass slowly from the beam to the quarter, slowly from the quarter astern, and fade out in the gathering night.

Darkness enveloped her now. The wind mocked her and drew her on and on, hour after hour, against the invisible wall of the continent ahead. Her defeat was too hard to bear. She felt herself, soul and body, full of the corruption of years; she felt the old fabric of her flesh going to pieces. It was the weariness. She was dying. The wind and the sea had her at last, and, passing into forgetfulness, she did not care.

Her way dragged. Time dragged. Black-water tongues licked over her settling freeboard, and continually the leakage from her open seams rose higher in the hold. She was heavy with the weight of water. She felt herself growing more and more unmanageable. No longer did her head point up to the angle of the wind, but now she made leeway farther to the north. She knew this by the moon that had arisen.

Once, rising wildly against this lethargy, she called

on herself to fight. She strained to listen, like a woman aroused in the night, and she heard John whimpering in his sleep, where he lay huddled on the coco-matting beside the companionway sill. And Francisco? Francisco was sleeping too, but she no longer dared to wonder why Francisco slept.

Never mind! Fight! Fight! Fight! On to the end!

After that, immediately, she seemed to pass over into a dream.

She was a racing sloop once more, full of the pride of beauty and the arrogance of youth. She saw herself straining in joy to the loves of gallant strangers, the wind and the sea. She heard herself singing in a high, febrile voice. Out of the past it crept like a thread of agony. It frightened her. She wanted something, and she could not think what it was.

She saw flickering in a thin and artificial light the ghosts of the black syndicate. She seemed to run to them, holding out her heart, but they had vanished. No, it was not them she wanted; it was some one else.

Dick and Gail and Helen were with her, souls without care or pain. She heard the echo of pistol-shots and felt weights crumpling down. In her horror she groped for something. What was it?

She felt the stain of a man's spittle in her heart.

Oh, some one! Somewhere! Behind a wall! Some one with clean hands! No, with soiled, hard hands! Some one without trouble or hurt! No, some

one who was always troubled, and hurt from birth to death! Some one stronger than life! No, some one weaker than anything; some one soft and small and bewildered, commanding the last help she had to give.

The moonlit water washed her. She made a slower and slower way. Sinking deeper, she had escaped the dominion of the wind. She hardly knew it. She did not realize that it was the tide that had her now. The flowing tide, bearing her irresistibly against the land.

There came an odd flavor in the wind, a half-remembered scent. It ran through her dream and smote her with a deeper horror.

"Down? Not down! Up! Up where the red gods are! To drink life like wine, and be drunk with it. And after us the deluge!"

She seemed to see a black headland standing over her in the moonlight. No, it was not seeming now. It was. She saw it truly, the southern pillar of a sea-gate. For there the wind and tide had brought her. And there in the water on her port side she felt the nearness of a sunken rock that tried again to stab her. She tried to writhe away. Helpless in the grip of the tide, she felt herself borne down for the second time upon that blade.

She felt the death-thrust without pain; a long, splintering gash beneath her waterline. She fell immediately into a steep, port-side list. But still the tide bore her on and on, a drunken thing in the night. Instant by instant she settled; instant by instant the

tide running strongly through the gate, harried her on.

A blur of lights spread across her vision. She saw the town of no trouble; the laughing town. She saw a dim thicket of masts, a crown of white hulls nosing their moorings. She seemed to hear them whispering about her, wondering in drowsy disdain what this bedraggled thing could be that the tide brought in under the midnight moon.

As if it were something in memory, she heard the muffled launches arrowing across the sheltered night. Faint laughter. Calls.

A propeller beating the water nearer at hand. Exclamations! Commands brusk and loud.

She scarcely knew. All her faculties were blurred.

"Here, lend me a hand aboard!"

"What's this?"

"Good God, don't bother with the man. Can't you see you can't clear him of those knots in time? Don't stand there asking how she came here! She's here, and she's sinking this second, and I tell you again the man's been dead any number of hours. Get the kid overboard into the boat, and for God's sake look alive!"

"Yes, coming, Doc! Catch the kid!"

A tiny wail, half waking, mystified.

"Oh, little John! Little John!"

Once her bow lifted, giving back the moon from her

scarred black paint. Then all in one motion she went down.

She sank slowly through the water, obliquely, as if there were a crystal stairway lit by the faint, submerged irradiations of the moon. And Francisco went with her and held her wheel. And now she was not afraid. She was tired, and she slept.

III

MARY DRAKE AND WILL TODD

MARY DRAKE started out in life under the handicap of what was known in Far Harbor as a classical beauty. And there was the further handicap of a residence with white pillars in Upper Main, and the proud name of Drake. Three boys at Academy proposed to her; they were the only ones that dared. Charlie Wright became meat-cutter for Henty and later county clerk. Penn Merrihew founded the Island Arcade, fruit and soda-water. Will Todd was the only one she smiled at when she refused him.

"Why not?" he had demanded.

"I don't love you, Will. Isn't that reason enough?"

He stared at her with his close-set red-brown eyes in spleenish wonder.

"But have you no ambition?" he said, and that was when she smiled.

Will went off to the mainland. He drifted around a good deal. He had written the class ode on graduation and considered himself something of a poet. Poetry failing, he tried newspaper work. It was said that he drank. He had just "resigned his position on the staff of the Brooklyn *Eagle*" when, at the time of his father's death, he gave up and came back to his

native isle. Ultimately, with his small inheritance, he took over Elm Bewley's share in the *Advocate and Sentinel.* The day he "accepted the editorship" he came out in a silk hat and frock coat, and with them (to the amusement of the Nathan Grangers of New York) low tan shoes.

The Grangers were too nice to betray their emotions. Will had caught the first startled flight of Nathan's eyes, however, and his face reddened.

"Inadvertence," he muttered. Then, his color deepening, he drew up his lank shoulders. "That's a damned lie. They're all the shoes I own."

It left a silence hard to fill in the Summer afternoon of lemonade and cookies in the high-walled garden behind the pillared house in Upper Main. Mary Drake was very angry. It was all she could do to keep from crying: "Mr. and Mrs. Granger are here at my invitation, and that's something, Will Todd, that you are *not.* If you must be a clown, please be one somewhere else."

She couldn't look at Nathan. The prospect of this afternoon with the young novelist and his bride had been hard enough already, harder than any but Mary herself could guess, an act of tragic acceptance, the closing of a book. Of all the boys she had known as a girl, Nathan was the only one to whom she could in conscience have given the keeping of her beauty and her pride of name (an island pride, beyond anything the mainland knows).

The Grangers were of the few "old Summer families": Nathan had been brought to the cottage near the Point every season since he was born. None had realized that he was marked for bigness earlier than Mary had. Eagerly, in her dreams of ten years gone, she had joined her destiny with his; she too was marked for something, and she knew it, by instinct and without vanity. Once, at a beach-party, walking the sand beneath the stars, Nathan had nearly asked her. But being sensitive he had been afraid.

He had married a Hartford girl just now. This was the first time she had seen the island. She had been raving about it. "Oh, but, Mary Drake, you're so lucky here with your moors and your oceany winds and your soft old lovely town; you don't *begin* to know!" Now, looking up with a humorous kindness at Will Todd, defiant above them, she laughed to ease the situation. "Well, after all, tan shoes or black; I sometimes wonder if it isn't the people who wear the black ones that look the sheepest to the man in the moon. And if *anyone's* to set the styles, it seems to me the editor of such a paper as the—the ——"

Will shifted his eyes to her quickly, surprised and gratified. "The *Advocate and Sentinel*," he supplied. "It's a small thing, but mine own. Before I die I hope to see it known from here to San Francisco. My humble aim, Madam, is to make of the Far Harbor *Advocate and Sentinel* another *Spectator*. I shall publish my own verse."

Nathan's good-looking, square-fleshed face was purple. He coughed.

"It's fun, though, isn't it, Todd? This newspaper game?"

As for Mary, Mary had never dealt with devils, and a devil possessed her.

"Did you know, Will, Nathan was something of an editor too before he gave it up for novel-writing? With a New York daily—wasn't it, Nathan?"

"Yes," Will took the word himself. "But he was only night city editor. At the *Advocate and Sentinel* I am editor-in-chief."

Mary laughed gaily. "However, Will, after all—New York——"

"I left New York. I've written a piece about New York. It's short; would you like to hear it? And you? Let me see."

He put his hat on his hip, threw out his chest, and stood tall. Staring away at the Round Pond Hills through a gap in the pear-tree, he intoned through his nose, like a cantor with a cold.

Ave! Manhattan! says Will Todd;
Hello, New York!
To-day you are young and growing; you are filled with the exuberant muscular health of your youth;
Your brain is fearless, pitiless, competitive, cosmopolitan;
Your heart, the heart of the pubescent giant, is excited;
The belly of the devourer hungers for more blood and more stone forever.
Ave! Manhattan! says Will Todd.

Not on your life! *Vale!*
To-day you were young and growing; you were the place for
a fellow with hard muscles and a belt to tighten.
But to-day is finished; to-day is yesterday, and to-morrow is
to-day now.
If you were old it would be all right, but you're not; you're
young;
And, still young, you begin to ease your belt over a certain
sleekness;
You're growing fat.

Now, if there is a thing that is a stench and abomination in the nostrils it is fat youth. Will Todd is going back to an old land where the jack-pines never grow much higher than a tall man's shoulders because the winds are rough and the soil is thin.

Vale! Manhattan! says Will Todd.
So long, New York!

It was painful to know what to say. Nathan, his face purpler than ever, clapped vociferously. "Darned good, old man! They've got to look out for you, I'll warn 'em!" Beatrice Granger, rosy, gazed down at her slipper-toes. Mary, letting her lip go from between her teeth, shrugged and turned to Nathan. "How is 'Ann Faithless' doing, Nathan? You haven't told me."

Nathan dried his brow with his handkerchief and looked relieved.

"Well, they're selling some copies. As a matter of fact if they sell many more I may begin to grow"

(with a merry wink at Will) "even fatter than I am now, dear me!"

Will clapped his hat on, and said: "I've read your book, Granger." Turning vehemently, he walked out past the house.

There might have been a certain melancholy beauty about this afternoon in the quiet garden of abnegation. But Will's clowning had spoiled all that. Presently the Grangers thought their carriage might be waiting. Mary went with them through the house. In the cool hall Nathan looked around him.

"It's strange to think of you all alone here, Mary. When I see that stairway I always see your mother coming down it. All the *grandes dames* in the French romances I read as a kid were your mother. You've some of it, Mary."

Mary stood between the pillars and watched them as they drove away down the tunnel of the elms. Soon now it was going to be something worse than strange to think of her alone here; it was going to be natural.

A minute had passed before she became aware of a glittering hat above the lilac-bush almost at her elbow. When she spoke his name Will came into view.

"Why did you come here to-day?" She was tried beyond endurance.

"To see you, Mary. Why else?"

"Supposing I didn't care to be seen by the like of you?"

Will studied her from the foot of the steps, his

Adam's apple protuberant above his Byronic collar and dark-red tie.

"You've never realized, have you, Mary, just what you could do for me?"

"For *you?*" She had never been like this; never spoken so.

"For both of us, Mary. And perhaps for the world."

She wheeled to enter the house, but then turned back swiftly.

"You asked me once if I had no ambition." Before she could help it her gaze had run after the retreating carriage.

"Worse luck—I have!"

Studying her with his narrowed musing eyes, Will shook a sorrowful head.

"Not marble—harder than marble—flint. With a flint and with a tinder, oh, Mary, Mary, we might have kindled a fire to light the dark."

"Will," said Mary, "you've been drinking. Go home."

In the distance she saw the Grangers' carriage turning the Bank corner into the Square. A tumbling paper made the horses jump, so that the exit from sight was flashing. Without glancing back to see if Will was gone she walked into the hall and closed the door. She surveyed the stairway, the masterpiece of a long-dead architect, an immaculate curve, slenderly banistered.

"So I too may come down you from now on—with no one to see me come."

Down-street there was confusion. Scared by a tumbling newspaper, two horses tried to go two ways. The carriage struck the post at Henty's corner. Nathan Granger had an arm and three ribs broken, and his bride of a month was killed.

The novelist was able to leave the island within a fortnight, taking with him the body of his dead Beatrice. Mary Drake went down to the steamboat wharf, where a considerable crowd had collected. She made no attempt to speak with Nathan as he was helped along the roped way to the gangplank, nor to catch his eye. She didn't know what there might be in her own eyes; she had been withheld by a kind of shame from studying herself too closely the two weeks past. Now only, at something in the man's air as he went painfully by, a new misgiving chilled her heart. What if Nathan hated the place so fearfully now that he would never care to come to it again?

Acquaintances nodded to Mary, but none approached; she was the only one on the wharf against whom the crowd did not press. This was because she was Mary Drake. Only when the lines were cast off and the boat was swinging was she jostled. Looking up with a frown, she saw that the jostler was Will Todd.

"Doggone the luck!" His face was red and sweaty; he had on a red-and-green blazer, but neither collar

nor tie. He shook Mary's arm in the vehemence of his chagrin and waved before her a copy of the *Advocate and Sentinel*, damp from the press. "I wanted Granger to have it. I've run all the way down."

The screed on the front page was boxed in black:

Poor Nathan A. Granger, the novelist!
Yesterday Nathan had everything, everything in the world;
To-day he has nothing at all but the need to be fearless.
He is twenty-nine years old.
Nathan A. Granger is not yet thirty.
To-morrow he will have everything; you watch, he'll have everything;
Everything back but the one thing, the need to be fearless.
The one thing that is priceless, says Will Todd.

Four years later Mary sat in the window and watched the "pass." It was toward an evening in February, and the "pass" was more considerable than usual, because it was the day of Afternoon Town-meeting, and folks were going home.

Under the elms where once a prince royal of Portugal bowed over the hand of a Fanny Dearborn, and once a Merchant Drake waited with his negro servant behind him while a Captain Isaac Todd, with his Burma boy behind *him*, came up the street from the river capitals of the Levant, there walked now a Mrs. Atkins and a Miss Allie Roach, too busy about the bathrooms they were having for the Summer trade

next season for a glance at Mary Drake in her window as they padded by.

There was also a May Freeborn. A May Freeborn once sat in Quaker-gray in the town-meeting that declared its august neutrality as between the armed forces of the Continental Congress and of His Majesty George the Third. This one to-day had made sure of the Flockard trade for the Atlantic Wet Wash by voting the widening of the town road to Flockard's Bathing-beach.

True, there walked the Bedfords. These old people still held up their heads. They were of the select few who came from time to time to call on Mary Drake—chocolate and wafers in Winter—in Summer, cookies and lemonade. Precisely at a given point on the snowy sidewalk both pairs of eyes turned up toward the middle window. Mr. Bedford removed his hat and Mrs. Bedford inclined her head. "Mary is a fine-looking woman," she confided to her husband, "like all the Dearborns and the Drakes," and as surely as if her ear had been between them Mary knew what it was she said.

It made Mary wince a little. There's a wince, admit it or not, in being remembered by one's elders alone, and called a handsome woman at thirty-three. For an instant, as they hesitated and appeared to meditate, she thought they were coming in, and she arose with a half-guilty impulse and stood back in the shadows till they passed on.

There came from the other direction a boy on a bicycle. He was having a hard time of it in the snow on the cobbles, and what made it amusing was that the boy was fat. The recollection of a phrase winged through Mary's mind. "If there is a thing that is a stench and abomination in the nostrils it is a fat youth."

Straightway she saw a Summer garden, and the wreckage of an afternoon. She saw Nathan's face in the powdery shadow of the little leaves, indulgently tickled, his blue eyes innocent of pretension or of vanity over his young and solid success—the success which, despite the break of the valley of his wife's death, had gone on like a boy's big snowball, catching wider layers of the readers of a continent with each of his succeeding books.

Mary wondered, her hands laid on her bosom. She wondered how deeply and lastingly he had loved that Hartford girl. She wondered how long it was going to take him to want to return to the island again in the Summer-time. She wondered whether, in his wanderings over the earth, he didn't sometimes feel a nostalgia—a need of something—of some one.

Early dark was setting in; the lamplighter, working up from Lower Main, turned the cloud of the sky blacker and blacker beyond the snow-traced boughs. The wind, two days old in the northeast, was strengthening again, stirring the tops of the giants above the

"widows' walks." As never in daylight or in Summer, the invisible Atlantic was all around.

More of the "pass" was coming, three blobs of blackness against the snow at the crossing of Senate Lane. When the blobs had turned into people Mary caught a sharp breath. She should have hidden in the shadows again, but whether it was the fascination of a distaste verging upon repugnance and self-pity and dismay, or whether it was pride, she was held where she was till it was too late, and Will Todd had seen her and waved.

She knew immediately that the worst was going to happen; with the editor of the *Advocate and Sentinel* it always did. Gathering in the arms of his companions, he came dragging them across the cobbles, ragtag, bobtail, and pell-mell. The heavy knocker sounded but once (and that was once more than Will Todd ordinarily used it), and straightway, presumptuous as always, he was in, scratching matches on his pants and calling: "Mary! What—ho! Here's the intelligentsia come to see you; give us a light!"

"What's the joke?" he demanded, coming into the parlor and lighting the lamps himself. "What are you smiling at, Mary, standing there that way?"

"I'm smiling at the irony of this."

"Yes." He nodded, for an instant meditative.

His head, carried habitually bare these days, was thatched with a disorder of prematurely grizzling hair. His eyes, lined deeply at the corners, went

quickly from this to that. The frock coat and top hat were long since discarded; now he was all for roughness—a rough, bright-plaid shirt open at the throat, corduroys, and lumberjack's boots laced with rawhide to the knees.

"Ironic. Yes, Mary. You see that too?" He shook himself and recovered his boisterous energy. "Come in, friends," he hailed the hall. "You all know Mary Drake; everybody in town knows Mary."

They entered, but not altogether comfortably, Roy Dearborn showing his illness at ease by his arrogant bearing, Mrs. Ruders hers by the nervous way in which she lifted her feet from the old Drake rugs. Roy was a consumptive type; he worked in the dry-goods store and drew libelous caricatures of the customers in his idle time. Minnie Ruders, who had gone in for needlework since Ruders' death, was at outs with everything. Too far along to get another husband or hope for a lover, she took it out in messiah-hunting, and in the erratic Todd she would have seemed to have found one. Still she had been born in Far Harbor and reared in its tradition, and this was the house of the Drakes.

Had its mistress spoken, it might have given Minnie a chance to recover her rôle of the small-town mutineer. But Mary's silence and her waiting, faintly supercilious smile finished the little seamstress. She launched out in an unnaturally high voice, intertwining her fingers.

"How do you do, Miss Drake? We looked to see

you at the meeting. You surely should have been there and seen Mr. Todd. When Pastor Conway began getting in some of his sly, pious digs, Mr. Todd gave him all he wanted. Oh, there was a battle royal. So *that* is the famous butterfly piece on the wall, is it? Well, now! Do you mind, Miss Drake, if I just ——"

But there Will interrupted. His eyes, which had been plying between the agitated speaker and the sullen, overimpressed young clerk, seemed to see a great light. The frown above them thickened. He rushed the pair.

"Weighed and found wanting!" He spread his arms, angrily herding. "Get out! Yes, both of you, out of that door and back to your kennels! If there's a thing Will Todd can *not* keep in his stomach, it's a hypocrite! Out!"

"I begin to tire," he said, returning from the act of eviction. He stood with discouraged shoulders, his thumbs to his temples. "Why is it that men, who ought to be gods level with gods, insist upon being earthworms with one eye on the sky?"

"Perhaps because it has occurred to some of them that gods are less than God."

Mary had never before made the mistake of letting herself in for an argument with Will Todd. His weariness was gone by magic; he wagged his head.

"Mary, Mary! Even you! I'd think you'd been

listening to Conway, this afternoon. 'If a certain journalist,' says he, 'would only quit gazing at the wonders of his own cranium for a while and come out with me and stand on Quankam Head and behold the wonders God has spread before his eyes.' Well, now, would you like to hear what I r'ared up and spouted? I can do it much better now, too, since I've pawed it over. It's not long."

Mary patted a yawn. "When you've finished with the room, Will, would you mind putting out the lights before you go—all but one?"

He wasn't to be feazed by a thing like that; not now that he'd got his teeth into the meat of his own genius. Turning to the window and staring out into the dark, he began to read in an avid and sonorous monotone.

Mary shrugged and went off to the back library. Even there, though, she couldn't get away from the penetrating drone; it followed presently and caught her up.

. . . But I say to you, says Will Todd to his Congregational Reverence,
If God is eternal, as you tell me, then God is a flux,
God is a current, a change, a perpetual becoming;
God is light.
All right.
But what is light but a senseless jiggling of the ether, till my eye arrests it?
What is space, till my eye limits it and divides it into shapes?

No, no, no! says Will Todd, on the top of Quankam,
Six foot high in his sock-feet,
Spouting like a bull-whale,
Waving his arms.
Don't talk to me about Beauty; I'm the lad that creates it:
Wanting my cunning it isn't, it wasn't, and never will be:
Wanting the say-so of my faculties there is no such thing.

No, Pastor; wanting my eye the tide is neither shadow-blue
nor scud-white on Nautuck Shallows;
The moors are bloody with no death in Autumn, gray with
no February, green with no April;
Wanting my tongue there is no salt in salt, no honey in honey;
Wanting my nose there is no tang in wood-smoke blown on
Winter mornings;
Wanting my ear there is no thunder, no bell, no song.

Beauty is of instants, not of eternity, Mister Pastor Joslin
E. Conway.
I am of instants—
(It would come as a surprise to God, perhaps, that there *are*
such things as instants, as colors, as sounds and shapes
and sizes.)
I am of instants; I am the two-legged emperor of instants—
I am Will Todd, Esquire;
I am Man.
Amen!

He hadn't realized till the end that his audience was gone. It was enough to hurt any one's feelings. Walking loudly, he found Mary at her walnut secretary, her elbows on the correspondence spread beneath

the candles, and her thoughts, in ironic bitterness, fixed on a daguerreotype in her hands.

"Here were men!" she mused.

They had the look of men. One was standing, his feet strongly apart, as he might have stood on the quarter-deck of the *Indian Princess;* the other sat, as he might have sat in his chair in the counting-house on Square Wharf or in the Moderator's chair at a March meeting; men with clear, hard eyes and big, hard fists, peers of a nobility islanded a hundred years in the ocean, asking the leave of no one, self-reliant, decent, dignified.

Mary repeated it: "Here were men!"

"Yes, but who were they?"

"You know, Will Todd. If it weren't for your pose ——"

"Honestly, I don't."

"Then you ought to be ashamed. This is my grandfather, John Dunkam Drake. That is *your* grandfather, Captain Isaac Todd."

Will almost shouted. "Beaverbottom!"

Mary started to her feet. "Will *Todd!*" On the white of her cheek red sprang, like the mark of a slap. But then it faded again at sight of the expression in his eyes. Her heart sank: she knew that glint of vulpine glee.

"Old 'Beaverbottom!' I hadn't thought of that legend in years, Mary! Give me!" Plucking the

heirloom that was priceless from her hands, he ran away.

The trouble with Will Todd was that he had no taste; neither had he any business acumen. Given either one of these saving qualities he would never have set out to print the "Island History," which began with the doggerel "Beaverbottom" in the issue of the Friday following.

Isaac Todd, of old times, captain of a big ship,
Coming home from China wore his beaver on his head.
Isaac Todd, Cap'n Todd, Deacon Todd of Apple Street,
Gone to church a Sabbath passed his beaver through the pews.
Isaac Todd, the widows' friend—the time he ripped his night-shirt,
Scatting out the back way through Milly Bewley's fence—
The night he hollered *Murder!* when they chased him home through Pie Lane—
Isaac Todd, of old times, captain of a big ship,
Galloped with his beaver to his bottom all the way.

Jethro Ruders owned a three-fourteenths lay in the *Advocate and Sentinel;* so did John Dearborn; the remaining four-sevenths, the controlling share, was Will Todd's. As, in the months and years that followed, they saw the subscription-list of the once solid and respected journal shriveling away under the blight of Todd's "smart-Aleck" calumnies, till only the meaner families of the south end would look at it, or snickering off-islanders, Ruders and Dearborn would have liked to wring Will's neck; short of that violent

act they were powerless. It was early in the Spring of 1901 that they finally went to Judge Lowe and asked him: "What can we do?"

The judge was an islander, and slow to action. He didn't know exactly. Unless, of course, they wanted to institute proceedings. They weren't quite ready for that; they were islanders too. They let the rest of the Spring go by, defending themselves against their neighbors and angrily protesting their helplessness. In May, even Miss Perry's Library stopped handling the sheet it had been Will's boast he would live to see "known from here to San Francisco." In June, of the second week's issue, half its front page covered with the editor's "so-called poetry," only a hundred and ten copies were printed, and thirty-six of these had to be brought back by the boy who "carried the subscribers."

On that day the first overt act of violence was offered to Will Todd. As he was walking in the Square a ship-calker by the name of Elbert Drake took him in the back with a wad of spittle. Will turned and knocked Elbert down. Elbert got up again, though, and soon had Will flat on the cobbles with "a face his own ma wouldn't've recognized." And to cap it off properly, now that the thing was started and the town awakened to vengeance, the "poet" spent that night in jail.

He would have spent more than one night, perhaps, had Judge Lowe not chanced to be an eye-witness of the act of expectoration. The Lowe family was one

of the oldest; it had suffered in more than one of its branches at the hands of the "Island History"; but still he couldn't quite go that. As an offset to turning Will out of jail, however, he called in the minority partners the following Tuesday and said to them: "Look here, boys, I don't think you want another number of that paper of yours coming out."

If ever men "cried in unison" it was then. "Heavens—*no!*"

"Then I'll tell you what I'll give you; I'll give you a writ."

Will Todd was just walking out of the paper office in Apple Street that evening, the paper half in galleys and the day's work done, when Constable Swann came at him with the writ of injunction. A lot had happened to Will in the past five days. It's hard to believe, but it's true; that any one on earth should bear him such a thing as personal ill will had never till now entered his head. He hardly knew it existed. He struck blows; but by their very solemnity and awkwardness people should have known them for what they were.

There's no moment so awful as the moment one discovers that the fun isn't fun any longer, and that the other kids are mad.

Will's face was still discolored, and scabs showed where his lips had been cut, but there were marks that went deeper than that. Worse than the puffing about the eyes was the look in them, at once wounded and

confounded, wistful to cry a truce and sulky with the defiance of innocence put in the wrong.

He saw the paper in Swann's hand and knew what was up in a wink. He wouldn't take it, but ran back into the office and slammed and bolted the door.

Little by little as the evening grew a crowd gathered, but for some reason best known to the island psychology they let it go at gathering, growling, and waiting. It never occurred to them to smash in the door. Time and tide are sovereign in sea-girt places; let them do the work. Constable Swann had the writ on the outside; Todd had no victuals on the inside. Sooner or later Todd would have to come to Swann. If not to-day, another day.

Toward eleven the crowd grew sleepy and dispersed. At midnight Swann put his paper in his pocket and went off home, leaving the Paper Block to eye the night with its chinks of gaslight, an absurd little brick citadel of mystery.

They expected Todd to be gone by morning, but he wasn't. He wasn't out by evening, or by still another day. The world went on: iron tires clattered as always on the stones of the Square, not two hundred feet away. It was the year's busiest season, Summer people pouring off the boat, cottages being opened, grocers and hackers in a sweat. Only in Apple Street was there a patch of quiet, like a patch of island Winter hanging on beyond its time.

The impatience of those that waited grew, but as

fast as it grew it changed to a half uneasy speculation, and nothing was done. It's hard to bluster in the face of enigma, and enigma the Paper Block remained, not a stir of a shade or the peep of an eye out of it, and not so much as a whisper of life till early Friday morning, when Swann, come down yawning, heard through a keyhole the clank of the foot-driven press at work.

As a simple mechanical thing that feat of Will Todd's is hard to overestimate. It must be remembered that he was neither a typesetter nor a pressman himself, and that for eighty-odd hours he had had nothing to eat and no sleep.

When he opened the door at noon with a sheaf of papers on his arm he looked at the people who were waiting with an expression of insolence, triumph, and melodramatic weariness. "Where is Eddie Bease?" he demanded at large.

The fat boy who "carried the subscribers," there through force of habit, was wheeling his bicycle forward when Swann waved him back.

"Not to-day we don't!" He thrust the writ under Will's long nose. "You're so fond o' po'try, read that!"

Will read it. "But this is an injunction against publishing another issue of the *Advocate and Sentinel*." He made a grimace. "Who wants to?" He laid back a limp fold of the printing on his arm. Where the Old English capitals of the familiar name-line were wont to be there was only a legend in common type,

and the legend read: "THE WORKS OF WILL TODD, ESQUIRE, OF FAR HARBOR. COMPLETE UNABRIDGED DE LUXE FIRST AND MAYBE LAST EDITION LIMITED TO 100 EXAMPLES. THE EXAMPLE ONE NICKEL—5c."

IN THE twenty columns of the traditional once-folded sheet of the island journal, ragged where the lines were choppy and thick as paragraphs where the longer-winded verses never came to an end, and more uncouth than ever with spaces awry and letters upside down, the entire body of his "poetry" was crammed. There was the whole of his "Odyssey of a Drunken Bum," the hodgepodge of juvenilia remembered, sometimes only in fragments, from his mainland wanderings; there was another hodgepodge under the title of "Town Meeting," and there was all of the "Island History," from "Beaverbottom" down to the effusion known as "John Antichrist of Round Pond Road"—

> . . . the man who took a bath on *Wednesday*,
> The twenty-fourth of December,
> Christmas Eve.

Constable Swann was taken aback, but for a moment only. Creature of legal quibbles, he wasn't going to be got around by a legal quibble like that.

"All right, but I don' care; you ain't going to distribute it, nor utter it, nor disseminate it, nor yet send it through the mails. You take it back where it come

from and you leave it lay. And, Eddie Bease, you run on home."

The crowd yelled as Todd retreated, and one or two threw stones.

If they figured the episode finished, however, they hadn't fathomed Will Todd's mood or his capacity for punishment. At half past two that afternoon he stood at the corner of Candle Street and the Square, playing his own newsboy and defiantly crying his own wares.

Mary Drake, who had been in at Miss Perry's shop, buying herself a volume of Shelley for a birthday present, walked out into the very midst of it. She got the situation but confusedly, a medley of epithets and catcalls, a turbulence of bodies in motion; all she heard distinctly was a harsh voice shouting: "A nickel to-day —a dollar to-morrow! If you can't read, put it away for your children's children! Five cents for the seamless garment of Will Todd, Esquire, and him crucified!" Then of a sudden she was aware of Will's face, thrust toward her, a light of fierce interrogation in his blood-veined eyes.

"What do you say, Mary? Want a paper, Mary Drake?"

For the instant she was fascinated; she felt her jaw hanging there, in people's sight. Red chased white over Will's stubbled cheeks; he pushed something at her, crying: "But no nickel, Mary! To you, and you

only, I give it free. A gift from Will—to-morrow's your birthday, Mary Drake."

One of the awfulest things that ever happened to Mary happened in that instant. Half the haggard countenance before her vanished in the pulp of a thrown tomato, and three spurts from it flew on the creamy homespun of her sleeve.

For hours at home, with hot water, tepid water, soap, naphtha, Mary worked in a kind of cold sweat of the soul to wash those spots away. Even when quite gone they weren't gone; no more than the hand of *Lady Macbeth* would that fabric ever be quite clean again.

As she had fled from the scene of that disgraceful brawl down-street she had been conscious, even in her panic, of a sudden thickening of missiles in the air, and of a new note in the voices behind her where only jeering had been before. Now in the cool heliotrope-and-amber twilight of the sitting-room she hoped that they had killed Will Todd. She never had known she could feel like this, but she did. She hoped with a hope like prayer that the island of her fathers had risen at last and plucked out the eye that offended. And she hoped there had been no off-islanders present to witness the shameful thing.

Once she heard some one coming through the gate. She ran and bolted the door, that hadn't been bolted in daylight since the house was built. The knocker sounded twice, jarring her as she leaned there. The

latch was tried, and the knocker banged again, before the feet outside went away. She never did know whether it was Will Todd or not.

In the evening the Reynoldses, cousins of a sort to Nathan, called to take Mary to the dance. It had been Mary's habit of ten years to go with them, or with the Grangers or the Peels, to two of the Yacht Club dances, the first one and the last. She rarely danced, herself; often she remained but an hour and then slipped away. It was more in the nature of a gesture of hospitality, an islander's welcome to the island in June, and in September a farewell. To-night she might have been excused, but the will of an iron line reasserting itself, she stiffened her neck and went. And let her life in for a spill.

Will Todd was vending his merchandise at the Yacht Club door. Driven out by his own, and wanting in a loyalty that is part of the birthright of the poorest islander, he had come to traffic with the Philistines. All that he had done till now might have been forgiven. This was the unforgivable. To make it worse, in the bitterness of his apostasy he had quit calling his wares at an honest price and made himself deliberately a mendicant. Half-bearded, stoop-shouldered, soiled, and bleary-eyed, he stood at a corner of the steps with his battered "works" on a forearm, and in his hand, held out beggarwise, his hat.

A penny, a nickel, a quarter; anything. (Don't miss it; it's too killing.)

Some of the older seasoners, knowing the editor of the Far Harbor paper from other years, were embarrassed, and kept their eyes away as they passed in. But there were plenty of newcomers and younger ones who enjoyed this joke on the quaint proud island, and if they didn't giggle in the fellow's face they waited only till they were half inside the door; and there, when they had cast their eyes over Will's prodigies of self-expression, they didn't stop at giggles, but screeched with heavenly unbelief and ran about trading chosen morsels in oratorical glee. In the end they tired of it of course, as Summer people do, and, the orchestra striking brightly into the opening waltz, most of them dropped the oddities into the corners that were handiest—for a man named Stowell to gather up.

Peter Stowell was born a poor boy, and though he now owned a packing-factory in Indiana he couldn't yet pass a pin without retrieving it. Altogether he garnered eleven copies. One of them, which I saw in a shop in Madison, Wisconsin, last Summer, was selling at seven hundred and fifty dollars, and parts of "Half Past Ten at the Drug-store" and "John Antichrist" were missing at that, where a corner of the second sheet was gone.

Mary Drake didn't know all these ghastlier details. She never got beyond the spot on the walk where she first saw Will.

That afternoon she had hoped and prayed that they had killed him. But "they" were islanders.

They were his blood-equals, the jury of his peers. Here was another business altogether. Here were off-islanders! *Mainlanders!* Mainlanders making unhidden sport of an islander, the grandson of Isaac Todd, of Huram and Martha Bease, the son of Phina and Jonathan Todd!

You can't understand what happened to Mary Drake without knowing the island and its generations. The Reynoldses couldn't. When they pressed her arm to urge her on they were mystified by the glance she turned upon them, as if she were a stranger to them, and not a friendly one by any means.

"But this is intolerable!" she cried. "They—they ought to be *lynched!*"

She looked at Will Todd again and scales fell from her eyes. There are bad boys and there are backward boys in any family. She saw him no longer the insolent egotist, but the overgrown, sullen, baited boy, driven from pillar to post, from shy swaggering to wicked folly, by people's ridicule, and wanting on this earth but two simple things and both maternal—forgiveness and a spanking.

She had let her life in for a spill, and just there was where it occurred. For a moment Mary forgot entirely that she was the Drake. Going quickly to stand by Will, she faced the offending aliens, her chin high and her cheeks aflame, the while she chided him and upbraided him beneath her breath, "You idiot! You impossible!" and shook his arm, crying, "Throw

it away, Will; aren't you ashamed?" until with a loud laugh he dumped his hat and sent his ignominious harvest of nickels and quarters flying. Then she took him away.

As she led him by the arm through Stair Lane and through the late June dusk under the maples of Constitution Street, his gamble with sleep and hunger began to go against him. His neck sagged, his shoulders crumpled, his feet shuffled, striking sparks on the bricks.

"Where are we going?" he asked by and by.

"You're going home, where you ought to have been long since, Heaven knows! And if your parents were alive to give you a thorough-good spanking, so much the better it would be."

"Home!" He began to weep in his weakness, and with the tears running down into the corners of his mouth he gave a watery giggle. "What home? That's the joke of it, Mary, old girl."

"Home to your house ——"

"The house was sold last week to keep the d-d-darned p-p-paper going."

"You can get something to eat and a room for the night at the Dearborn House then. You've money?"

"I threw all I had in their d-d-damned f-f-faces down there. You saw me, didn't you?"

It must be remembered that he wouldn't have been Will Todd had he not been to the core of his heart and the marrow of his bones, and incurably, the dramatist.

With the heel of a hand he struck away his tears and cried: "Leave me here in the gutter, Mary; any place is good enough for Will Todd!"

They went through Diamond Street, where the lamps were lighting, taking the long way around to avoid the publicity of the Square.

"Where are we going, Mary?"

"That's what I'm wondering, Will."

They came into Upper Main, where it was already dark. Inside the door of her house, when she had made a light, Mary called for her servant: "Anna Bease!" And then: "Anna, come quickly and help me!" she cried with a catch of her breath, for Will Todd had gone down in a heap on the floor.

He opened his eyes when they had got him as nearly undressed as they would between them in the bed in the spare chamber on the third floor. He blinked at the candles, and then, in obedience to Mary's command, at her.

"Open your mouth and take this." She fed him broth with a big spoon.

Toward the end of it a light of ironical speculation gathered in his eyes.

"But, Mary, what are people going to say to this?"

Her lips neither flexed nor tightened.

"People who matter will not say anything that matters about Mary Drake."

He flushed at his whisker-roots, abruptly deriding

himself. "And *I* am the man that's always hollering how he despises hypocrites!"

As Mary was gathering up his things from the floor, he said out of a silence: "I ought to have known. I knew your mother."

Down-stairs Mary gave the clothing to Anna Bease, to be washed and ironed and brushed and pressed. The rest of the cleansing she arrogated to her own hands. Taking to the library what he had left of his "Works," thirty-odd copies, frayed at the edges and stained by fruit and bad eggs, she lit a fire on the hearth and burned them, crumpling them one by one as she laid them on.

Not till the last was browning at a corner did she give way to a curiosity which must have seemed morbid to her soul, and not then till a spurt of fire showed her amongst the jumble of print her mother's name. Shaking off the embers, she carried the remnant to the table-lamp and read.

The wisest woman in Far Harbor was Mary Dearborn.
She never knew that some one was fooling when some one told her as a youngster
That a foot is thirteen inches—thirteen linear inches to the running foot.
She never discovered. She built her life to that measure.
She built the house of her life with every foot of it an inch too long, and no skimping;
Every yard of every garment she ever fashioned was a yard and a twelfth of a yard over;

When they came to bury her they made the coffin a half foot grander than they needed;
But she never knew it and they never knew it and neither did God.

Error is ugliness, and Ugliness the only Error, the bigwigs tell you.
But I tell you that error true to itself through three dimensions
Can rear more beauty than all the sealers of weights and measures living.
I never knew a house of a serener symmetry than Mary Dearborn Drake's.

For a moment, when she had finished, Mary's mind was troubled. In that one moment anything might have happened. Strange doubts assailed her. She didn't know what to think. She wasn't used to this; it was safer to grow angry. And so she did.

"What a lie! What a blackguard lie! My mother an ignoramus? *Thirteen inches in a foot!* Oh—oh—I could ——"

She stood with her hands clenched and her lip between her teeth while the clock ticked twenty seconds. Little by little she began to discern that she was being tried in a new furnace. Little by little the color of fury drained from her cheeks and her muscles relaxed. "Poor fellow; forgive him," she said by and by. "He doesn't know what he's doing, surely." And presently, brooding into the lamp-glow: "*Somebody's* got to do something about him. If only to keep him out of the streets and off the town."

She felt better, but still there was the bad taste of the sacrilege in her mouth. She moved about the room. On a pie-crust tip-table by themselves, between two ivory book-ends, Nathan Granger's novels were arranged, two of them presentation copies, the others bought.

Emotion filled her as she bent over them. She couldn't have named it; in it there were mingled too many contradictory things, patience with impatience, happiness with anguish, pride with shame. It was curious about the books; somehow she was forever saving them; except for the first she had never read a word in any one of them. Why? Who knows?

Her fingers hovered over the volumes, but didn't touch them. She passed to the book-shelves and took down a copy of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King."

One of the things that had made Will Todd's society an especial trial to Mary was that she really loved real poetry. She enjoyed the sensation of marching with noble fantasies, caught away out of life by the cadence of beautiful phrases, mellifluous or austere.

When she read of *King Arthur* she always imaged him unconsciously as Nathan. She admired above all other figures of legendry the early, untroubled *Guinevere.*

Will Todd lived in Mary Drake's house all the remaining days of his life. Naturally, at first, there

was talk in the town; but Mary had been right about it: the people who mattered said nothing openly, and the ones who didn't matter didn't keep at it very long. There's that about a village of three thousand: it may take it a while to grow accustomed to a queer phenomenon, but once it has done so, anything different would seem to it queer.

Those five years were the happiest years of Mary Drake's life.

She didn't suspect it, for people never do. Sometimes, weary of the never-ending plague of Will's untidiness, kept though it was in theory to his third-floor chamber, to the kitchen where he ate with Anna, and the cellar where he tended the heater and sawed the fireplace-wood, she wished, with a vehemence, that only their stern intelligence had come down to her from her forefathers, and none of their sense of duty to their less fortunate fellow men.

And there were times still worse; times when, gone bad with spells of idleness he seemed neither able nor anxious to combat, Will took a wry delight in baiting her with his high and mighty arrogance. And when for days she had stood the strain of not hearing his poisonous asides and not seeing him over the top of her book when, trespassing upon the forepart of the house, he loafed around for hours with a gamin pugnacity in his eyes, as much as to say: "Who's got a better right here, I'd like to know?"—when she had borne this to

a certain point her nerves went to pieces and she saw black.

She would have given anything then to have been the woman of a south-end fisherman, with a raw throat and rough words, to tell him for once what she thought of him: "You lazy skunk! What do you think of an animal that calls itself a full-grown man, and yet is content to loaf around from one month's end to another and let a woman keep him? And sneering and grumbling half the time at that!" She would have given worlds to have been able to stand down to him and tell him what was what.

She had her innings, it's true. He came to her in the end each time, flaying his back with the whip of revilement and bumping his head upon the ground. She needn't wish then for abusive epithets; all she had longed to throw in his face he threw himself, with a passionate brutality.

"I strut around in a dirty shirt hunting out windbags to puncture and *hypo*crites to slay. *I!* Pah! I make me sick!"

It restored Mary's sense of values to hear him. It made her feel more like herself. He was pitiless, once started.

"And I swell around, calling myself such a marvel of a genius! such a wonder of a poet! I'm nothing. I'm a cripple. I cry like a babe for the apple of beauty, and my poor little fingers can never reach it. I howl for the rod of truth, and no more do I get it into my

fumbling hands than it's bent as crooked as lies. I have nothing. I *am* nothing."

Little by little, washed by humility and refreshed by prostration, his despair would begin to take shape in his imagination, exciting words and flowing cadences; aroused like the giant from the touch of earth, he would climb to his room, bolt his door, get out his bitten pen, and fall to it.

So an ordeal of another kind would begin, a week, a month of furious seclusion, up-stairs a room like a wolf's cave, down-stairs the duties of the charity-guest given a preoccupied lick-and-a-promise or left to perform themselves. There were days when he balked at coming down to meals, and Mary, climbing the two long flights to "see about it," was as apt as not to get a scorching through the solid door.

"What the devil! If a man can't have a little peace in his own house it's a pity! Be quiet, and please go away."

It came to the point once where Mary could no longer put up with him, and she turned him out. He stood gazing back at her from the sidewalk with an expression of incredulity and sorrow in his eyes until she closed the door; then he marched down to Ginny Salvadore's and got drunk on sailor whisky, trying to forget her failure and his disillusionment, and late that night she had to go and drag him out and bring him home. She had learned her lesson. She never tried that again.

All in all, though, those *were* the happiest years. It mustn't be thought that discord filled the whole or even the bulk of the days. Nor must it be imagined that even when Will was playing the bad boy, Mary didn't get something out of it. So long as she could remember what she was, and what *he* was, one of the effects of his Olympian tantrums was to magnify the bounty of her own patience, and mix with the pity she felt for him a quality of wistful humor and a hidden smile.

For she did pity him, truly. Sometimes when she spied him slipping out the side way with a large envelop covered with stamps ("borrowed" but lately on some vague pretext), a film of moisture blurred her sight, and she wished that the post-box to which he was carrying that ever-hopeful freight might have turned into a tree with candles, and she into a fairy publisher disguised as Santa Claus, and that she might have taken his offering and found it, by some Christmas magic, words of gold, and patted him on the shoulder with a "Well done!" and laid the wreath of genius on his hair.

That hair was full white now; with the slight stoop contracted by long sitting over a table and a certain growing emaciation that was like a burning from within, it gave him a look of many more years than his actual thirty-nine.

Mary, at forty, might have been thirty with her dark hair, or twenty with her untouched brow, save

for one fact—the fact that ten more than thirty and twenty more than twenty of her years would never come again. There had been a time when she had dwelt upon this irrevocable shrinking of her span as much as she ought to, if never altogether frankly; since Will Todd came to live under her roof, however, her mind had had other things to busy it, and compared with his febrile ups and downs her own high detachment began to seem a thing that was timeless and indestructible.

But there's always something that yellows and wrinkles, be it only the calendars December by December thrown away. There's the debt to the piper in a woman's heart. If Mary's mirror didn't show it to her it was because it lay deeper than her lineless white skin and crookeder than her serene, straight carriage, as crooked as unowned desires, as deep as the rebellion of the flesh.

It came for its pay in the dark of a night in the early Spring of 1906. It awakened her out of a sound sleep, as debts will do.

"Anna!" she called from her pillow. "What are you doing out there?"

There was no reply. But presently the soft tread in the hall became audible again, bare feet pacing restlessly.

"Anna!" And then, with the skip of a startled heart: "*Will!*"

"Yes?"

"Will *Todd!*"

"Yes?"

If it had happened the week he came, her first thought might have been of another sort. But he had been there nearly five years, a bother oftentimes, but only the sort a boy can be who wants a spanking to set him straight with his school and his chores again. So now her first thought was one of exasperation for his vagaries—a "this is too much!" Then a new misgiving assailed her. "Is he ill?"

Her mind, still queer with sleep, raced back to the day. He had had his hair cut, after a week of keeping at him. Spurred on, after his mercurial fashion, by this bit of sprucing, he had bedecked himself in his finest and gone about the place inordinately pleased with a novel plaything—Will Todd as the Beau Brummel of the Western world.

That hardly looked like approaching illness. Indeed, between his dramatics and the first soft weather of April, he had seemed better of the bronchial cough which had been dragging at him all the later Winter; his color had freshened to a sudden pink in the upper cheeks and the heaviness of his lips had gone.

All quite splendid in the daylight. Seen now in the dark, in a flash of troubled memory, it had the aspect perhaps of another thing. Before she knew what she was doing Mary was out of bed, across the room, and with the door a little way open in her hand.

"Will, what *is* the matter? Are you *ill?*"

"I wonder."

"You wonder—what?"

Mystified and more and more queerly uneasy, she opened the door an inch further and peered out. Then she nearly closed it, and stood petrified.

Out there in the hallway, where from somewhere a wraith of moonlight penetrated, Will was clothed in his nightshirt only; there weren't even slippers on his feet.

Presently she heard him moving. He began to pace. The padding footfalls and the hard breathing above them came nearer, hesitated, halted, went away for a dozen counts, again to louden, returning.

An April night isn't warm. The air struck through Mary's nightgown like a hand of ice. She ought to have shivered, but somehow she couldn't. Somehow she couldn't seem to do anything she ought to do. When Will, who had halted again, said abruptly: "Mary, I'll soon be forty!" she might have done ten sane things, the least of which would have been to close and bolt the door. And she did the one thing a half-wit would have known for wrong. Putting her white lips to the door-crack, she cried in a whisper of sheer distraction: "Hush, crazy, or Anna will hear."

He obeyed so completely that it was in turn confounding. He actually stopped breathing. The only sounds to be heard were from as far away as the south beaches, where the ground-swell rolled, and from as near as the pounding of the listener's pulse.

But the worst was the feeling that began to grow in Mary, of being abandoned by Mary Drake. Of being turned over with a criminal carelessness to take her chances with utterly strange emotions in an utterly, utterly, utterly strange night.

Will was nearer when he spoke again, though Mary had heard no sound. His whisper was low-pitched, but full-bodied, rushing, and vehement.

"Mary, I'm nearly forty. It's just come to me tonight. Very soon now I'll be beginning to grow old."

Mary opened her mouth, but she didn't know what on earth to say. She said: "You're nearly forty? I *am* forty, Will."

"Poor girl!"

"Hush!"

"I'll not hush! You've been robbed as well as I have, as wantonly. You've let yourself be tricked too into living on dreams ——"

"Hush!"

"And you, so beautiful ——"

"Please, Will! Please. Will, don't!"

All there was to hear was their breathing, on the two sides of the gray slit of the door.

Where was Mary Drake? Where was the truth—any truth but the truth of mutiny?

"Insane! Mad! Mad!" There was almost a wail in it, for with her sudden shivering Mary had grown so weak-as-water that the door might have done what it wanted in her hand. "Oh, madman! Oh, insane!"

Another silence: Will had stopped breathing out there again. One, two, three, four seconds he held it. Then it came whistling through his teeth.

"Hark, Mary, and quickly! Have you some money there in the room? Five dollars—ten—go and get it quickly and give it to me! Heaven! Don't you hear me? Go!"

She remembered opening the little drawer at the top of her dresser and groping. She remembered the fierce grasp of his fingers in the door-crack, cold as a dead man's on the banknote, and the thud of his feet running off along the hall.

She lay prone on her bed. She, Mary Drake! What was this nightmare, from which she seemed yet too weak with revulsion and too leprous-sick with shame to pull herself quite clear? Dreams? "Tricked into living on dreams?" Yes, she had had dreams. But of all men on earth—*a Will Todd!*

Sometimes in the black of that night that would never come to an end a shudder of scared mirth went out of her mouth and into the pillow. *Will Todd!* Sometimes, oppressed to suffocation, she tossed the bedclothes aside, but then hastily she wound them thick around her body again. Toward the dawn a new thought came, awfuler than anything.

"How can I meet him? How can I ever let him look me in the face again?"

Now that morning began to whiten the cracks in the

shutters she wished the night had been truly without an end.

She needn't have terrified herself as she did. She was spared the meeting that morning, for Will Todd was gone. He was gone all day and all the night that followed.

Between incredulity and relief, still doubting that each next moment he would be returning, she began to wonder. And wondering, sending memory back into the black episode, it fixed upon that money. Why had he demanded it so breathlessly? And grabbed it so fiercely when given? And she thought to herself: "He has gone to the Salvadore man's and gotten drunk again." And then, as swiftly as surely: "Was it all for *that*, then? Was it all nothing but a trick to—to get whisky money quickly?"

Mary writhed *then*. Didn't she writhe! For upward of thirty hours. She couldn't do anything, yet she couldn't do nothing: she moved continually about the rooms, from window to window. "I trust he's enjoying his whisky," she said to herself with a curling lip at least once in each half-hour.

It was Anna Bease who changed all that when, unaware of her mistress's indifference to Will's whereabouts, she tapped town gossip and came back with the news that he wasn't at the Ginny's place and hadn't been. And he hadn't left the island: that was sure.

Then where? With the return of a remnant of her self-esteem, it seemed to Mary that she began little

by little to comprehend. As another evening came on she felt the weight of the dreadful certainty settling down upon her. Poor Will! More ceaselessly than ever she moved from window to window, harkening to the roll of the surf that mends all madness on the distant beaches, in her heart four things, fright, guilt, pity, and a romantic and a tragic pride.

On the third morning a small boy in the back lane caught Mary's eye. When she had hurried out he said to her: "That Mr. Todd he's out there to Mazie Clegg's, and Mazie she wants you should come git 'im out o' there."

It didn't hurt at first. It was too mad to mean anything. Will Todd had stood in the night of the impossible-possible at the door of Mary Drake. From there, of his own choice, he had gone away to Mazie Clegg's.

Mary went to her room and studied herself in the mirror. A thin hysteria shook her. "Of course! He *would* feel more at home in that sort of place. Until his money—*my* money—gave out."

The boy was back that afternoon. Catching no eye, he came to the side door and opened it.

"Miss Drake, Mazie says ——"

Mary darted a glance at Anna, clearing the luncheon-table in the dining-room. "Hush!" she said to the boy. "Yes. Directly. Go along."

She had a buggy from the livery-stable early that evening, and, letting the man go back, she drove alone

out the Round Pond Road. It wasn't far to Mazie Clegg's. She could have driven to the door by the branch lane that led up the hill of the fallow farm, but she wouldn't do that. Turning the horse around at the lane-entrance, she sat with her eyes fixed on distance till Will appeared. Mazie herself brought him half-way down, as if to be sure he was on his way before she surrendered his elbow.

Mary didn't turn her eyes when he stood beside the buggy. "Get in!" was all she said. He kept looking back over a shoulder as they drove. She thought it was at the house, but it was at the wall of sunset standing up above the hill. It is in "The Two Houses":

. . . smoke.
And again, on another evening, masonry;
Brickwork;
Bricks as red as fire from the kiln-fires, and restless,
Shuffling and shucking on their fellows with a gritty sound,
And sifting the dust of their grinding in crimson ribbons,
Like ribbons of blood raying down from old wounds reopened.
There's one the shape of a half-shut fan raying down on
Quankam,
And on the pond inside and below it.
"Lookit!" says blond Kate, forgetting the sack she is making
Out of some purply stuff with fat pink roses,
"Ain't that a sight now, Poet? Like a painting?"

Will was the first to speak, still staring back at the masonry of sundown.

He caught her free hand with fingers like iron. It tugged but an instant and then lay dead. It was as if,

being of no further value to her now, she detached it from her person and left it there.

"Mary Drake, I've always loved you, but never till now!"

Mary pulled the horse up at the edge of town; she couldn't be going through the streets like that. When she had sat for two minutes her patience was broken and she cried between her teeth: "Have you no shame?"

"I *have*, and I shall never forget it!" But the note was curiously exultant. "Hark, Mary, how it goes: 'I was ashamed in the house of peace, and I shall never forget it: and I was at peace in the house of shame.' Oh, Mary, drive on. I've so much before me. I know so many things I never knew. I've ramped through life in a holy heat to knock down graven images, and now I know a man has got to have a graven image at last—that's why I turned the other night and ran away. Loose the reins and use the whip, Mary. Hurry! I've worlds and seas and mountain ranges to cross before my knees give out."

Mary studied him for the first time. From the neck down (save that she remembered the grip of his fingers) she would have said his knees had already given out beneath him. But the eyes above belied the disaster, and the sanguine color on the cheek-ridges protested that it wasn't so.

Mary lifted her brows and pursed her lips, feigning a polite mystification.

"I'm to hurry? And where, pray? Have you any especial place in mind you would care to have me take you?"

He lost all patience with her.

"Don't be a donkey! Take me home!"

THE poem of nineteen hundred and seven lines which begins, "I am a whole man; I have known the houses of two women," was written in nineteen days.

To Mary Drake that time will always have a cast of unreality, as a child might recollect a time it was up all night. There was the same disadjustment of clocks and habits; meal-hours and sleep-hours went progressively astray. As often as not, awakening with a start at noon and dragging up to know why Will wouldn't answer Anna, or why he was coughing, or why he wasn't coughing, she would find him just then thrown down in all his clothes across the bed, his red-rimmed eyes staring up at her with hostility and without recognition, only to close abruptly as she commenced to speak. From that until his three or four hours were accomplished, cannon couldn't have made them open again.

He slept without perceptible breathing. He might have been dead. There were moments that scared Mary. She banged his window and slammed his door. She resorted to panicky ruses, communing aloud: "Now's a good time to clean up this attic: I'll have Anna sweep up all this waste paper and burn it in the

yard." As she messed the written sheets around on the table then, her eyes, for all she could help it, would detach a passage here or there from the body of the monstrous rigmarole.

Waking in dead night with words adrift from a dream on her tongue—
"Isosceles triangles." . . .
Why isosceles triangles? Why triangles at all? That's silly.
Church spires are isosceles triangles; arrow-heads are isosceles triangles;
So are asps' heads. So is the moon-pattern on the floor in the hall.
With a strange heaviness the symbol passes. It is the moon now;
And Mary thinks: "Nothing grows on the moon, nor germinates nor ripens."
But suddenly, lifting her cheek out of the hollow of her hair,
"*Yes! and yet*—" The heaviness goes, and the heart of pride resurges.
"*What man has not lifted the arms of his childhood—what one as a lover*
Has not lifted his eyes to that beauty too far and too white,
And turned him, blinded a little by it,
And taken less?"

It would have been salvation to dare grin at it, dare laugh in the "poet's" face, awry there on its broken-looking neck, its mouth open for the flies.

There were fragments as meaningless to Mary and still more disordered.

Farmer Riot puts a quarter of a spud in a hill and looks over at Mazie's.
He's a judge in his robes:
"Thirty days hard for the punk," says he, "and burn her house down."

Farmer Riot puts a quarter of a spud in a hill and scowls over at Mazie's.
He's a cop with a club:
A belt in the guts for Maze, a boot for Meg, and for the blond one.

Farmer Riot puts a quarter of a spud in a hill. He's a stout young netter.
He's out for a time:
Wets his lips at the door: "G'd ev'nin', Maze; me for the blond one."

Farmer Riot puts a quarter of a spud in a hill. And that's a potato.

Day and nights, day-nights and night-days, flickered by and were lost count of. One morning (or was it an afternoon?) Mary read an item in the rehabilitated *Advocate and Sentinel:*

It is rumored that Mr. Nathan Granger, the noted novelist so kindly remembered by many islanders, is to return to the Pebbles cottage for the season, after an absence of some years.

Mary went to her room and looked at herself in her mirror. For the first time in her life she seemed to see herself a little blurry, a little berumpled.

No wonder! Catching up a comb, she plucked the

pins from her hair and let it down over her shoulders. She brought a wave around from the back and studied it. She carried it to the window for better light. Yes. Among the dark-brown folds there were two ribbons of gray.

Beyond the ceiling Will Todd coughed and coughed. Between coughs he thumped his sock-heels on the floor. He was writing:

. . . Kate looks thoughtful.
Leaves off scratching where the corset was and turns her eyes in.
" 'I-may ame-nay is-ay ate-Kay'—
That's how we used to talk when I was a kid in New Bedford."

Mary's eyes were on the paper she had let fall on the floor. "It is rumored that Nathan—it is rumored that the Prince, weary of the world's cheap triumphs, is coming back through the Wood of Thorns to find ——"

To find what? A Sleeping Beauty a slattern for very want of sleeping, and gray streaks in her hair. An Enchanted Palace reasty with a slum-rat's coughing, and noisy with his thumping heels.

"It's not fair!" She flung a glance of resentment at the ceiling, and it blurred away in tears. "No, but it is *not* fair!"

She ran back to the mirror and tried to do up her hair with a new cunning (and bitterly ashamed) to fold the grizzled patches away from sight. But her

hands would clench; the pins would mash to shapelessness.

"Because I was once a little merciful I'm made a tool and a fool, and my house a hovel and a tenement! *Oh, when will he die?*"

She thought he was on the way of dying, truly, on the afternoon of the twentieth day. He had thrown himself across his bed at noon to lie through his few hours of cataleptic sleep, and everything as usual. But when five passed, and six, and eight, and when with the dark at nine he showed no signs yet of shaking it off, it began to grow seriously queer.

Mary looked in at midnight. He still lay in the same position, thinner than ever in the depression of the mattress, his head off at an angle, his wrists fallen down to the floor. She stepped to the bed and touched him, shook his shoulder with increasing violence, holding her breath. She looked around, helpless, and saw a new thing. His silly papers were no longer littered everywhere; some of them were crumpled in the waste-box and some were in the center of the table, in a neat stack with clean sides.

"Oh!" She let her breath out. "His—his—his 'masterpiece' is finished, then." The weirdest feeling came over her.

In the morning he was still the same. She shook him, yet more violently, crying: "Will *Todd!*" He opened his eyes and for five seconds stared at her.

"I'm all right. Go away and let me be."

Early in the gray of still another morning, starting upstairs with the sleep not yet out of her eyes to know the worst, she had one of the frights of her life. She met him coming down.

He must have been awake for some time, for his clothes were brushed and freshened (he had on a clean shirt) and his shoes polished; he was shaved with an extra care and his hair had been combed with a wet comb.

"Good morning, Mary Drake. How splendid you've been! What a wonder you are!"

Mary subsided against the stair-rail. "I—I thought you were ——"

"You thought I was on the rocks? Not by a long shot. I'm as tough as a bull. I never felt better in my born days, dear Mary."

There was a strong flush under his skin; he seemed in hours to have regained a year's loss in weight; in his eyes, whose pupils were slightly dilated, there was a light of Elysian banter.

"Mary!" he cried. "Why, Mary—aren't you proud of me?"

She couldn't speak. She couldn't tell him that the trouble was that this year Nathan was coming.

"Anna!" she called down the other way, "come here immediately," and retreated to her own room.

When the man came the mistress was in a fever of packing.

"Run down to the livery as fast as you can, Anna,

and tell Peek he must get me to the boat. I'm going to Boston for a few days. Dash!"

MARY came back from the mainland the second day following, May-day, and a perfect one. She sat on the top deck of the little steamer all the way across, feeling curiously untied from herself, her life and her background, a little irresponsible, a bit "off-island," and as if any strange thing might happen.

And a strange thing did. Among the magazines she had with her was a French *revue* of sorts, which she had picked up in a department store where a fashion show was being held. She had little French, but the pictures amused her, beguiling her fancy away into the wide world. Toward the rear, where the advertisements began, a column of heavier reading caught her eye. It was headed:

LA VIE LITTÉRAIRE
Sur l'esprit nouveau du Nouveau Monde. III. La poésie:
(*a*) . . . WILL TODD, *dit* ESQUIRE

It was startling for a moment. She had to work it out. Of course it was simple, when she got to it. Some Summer person on voyage, lugging along a copy of the "Works" treasured from that quaint episode of long ago, had given some Parisian a heavenly chance to "rag" the "barbarians."

She wondered if Will would get that, if she showed

it to him. It would be cruel. He would take it seriously, nine chances to one; swallow it whole.

But thinking of Will, and the mess to face, her holiday would have been over, with that, even if she hadn't heard the buoy at the jetties tolling its bell.

It had been a strange thing, but not as strange as the thing that was presently to happen. As she made her way through the crowd on the wharf, looking for Peek and the phaëton, she became aware of a mild confusion behind her, nearer the gangplank, and then Link Clothyard, the expressman, exclaining aloud: "Well, well, well! *Mister* Granger! Happy to see you with us again—like old times. You *are* early, though, *ain't* you?"

Mary whitened and half turned. Of all ironic things—Nathan on that boat with her the whole way across! But in a wink the white was crimson; she took back her half turn, lowered her face, and fled.

The house was empty when she got there. Anna, not expecting her for another day, had gone to her mother's. Mary knew this, yet she went about calling sharply: "Anna, where are you?" This was because of a constraint about calling the thing that was important: "Will, where are *you?*" In the end, driven by the breathless shrinkage of time, she would have had to come to it, had she not, in passing a rear hall window, espied his shadow in the garden below. She started down-stairs in haste, but before she reached

the kitchen door her pace had abated. Now that she had found him, what was she to say?

What she had to say, and quickly, was; "Nathan will be here any moment; you've got to go."

She gasped a little at first full sight of him, for he had on a high hat, a frock coat, and tan shoes. Fate playing at ghosts. A yard one way or the other, he stood almost exactly where he had stood on that long-dead afternoon when he had spoiled with his spoutings the garden-party that might have been beautiful as well as melancholy. But now it was later in the day; it was nearly seven, and the sun, come down below the eaves of the pear-trees, sent in a reddening beam. Leaning forward across the back of a garden-bench, which might have been a pulpit, or as well a rebel barricade, he gave back the stare of the descending orb.

Evidently unaware of Mary's coming, he opened his mouth in apostrophe.

"Poor old sun! You're not what you were. You're going, down, down, down. Just when Will Todd's coming up. Little while ago you were the God-all-blinding mighty of noonday, and now Will Todd can stand and look you square, and you can't make him turn his eyes away."

A spasm of mirth ran over him, from his thin ankles to his swollen hat.

"Will Todd, Esquire! the world's champion—blow-hard!"

Mary had been about to clear her throat or scuff a foot on the flagging, but something in the tone of that held her from it. Continuing to watch him, solitary in his spotlight on the cosmic stage, she fell prey to a fascination she couldn't throw off, and for moments even haste was forgot.

He seemed gradually to collapse before her eyes. A boy, swinging an exuberant hammer around for fun, had had the ill luck to hit himself on his own head. "Blowhard!" He didn't *seem* to grow less in stature; he *did* grow less; it wasn't metaphor; it was vivid actuality. Degree by degree the obliquity of his legs increased. Under the inexorable thrust of a weight his knees buckled; his shoulders sank to the level of the bench-back, and only his fists on it, with their blue knuckles standing out, continued to carry the fight and hold him from going.

It couldn't have lasted long; it was probably a matter of no more than seconds. All the while he kept looking straight at the sun, taking punishment, the sweat running down his face turned to dribbles of blood by the bright-red ray. It was a queer, private Gethsemane sort of thing; but it had an end. It reached a nadir. Will let out a gasp: "Not by a damn sight!" shut his eyes tight, opened his mouth wide, reared erect like a goaded bull coming out of the mud, and opened his eyes again into the sun's core. He began to speak, without apparent hesitation, in a hoarse, throttled voice:

Somebody's gone and lost a boy in the woods.
What's the boy to do when the night falls and the bears come?
He's not very big, and the bears are pretty big;
They can see in the dark and they know the woods,
And he can't, and he doesn't.

Somebody's gone and lost a boy in the woods.
It's all right, though: he's death on bears, and he can blow-
hard:
"You're not very big: you can hear I'm awful big:
I've a terrible gun and a long bright sword,
And I'm Will Todd, and I'll get you!"

Mary scuffed on the flags and cleared her throat.

"What *are* you gibbering?"

"Mary!" It was startled and unmistakably relieved and glad. His hands still held the bench in a death-grip, but his head went up.

"And what *are* you doing," she cried, "in those ridiculous duds?" But before he could answer she had caught a breath. "Why, it's your *birthday!*"

"And is that why you came back, Mary? You remembered?"

She ought to have known that compassion never got her anything but trouble with the presumptuous man, but there was something too disarming in his attitude. Moreover, her soul had the weight on it of the blow she had yet to deal. So she nodded and lied by evasion.

"Yes, I remembered, Will."

"Now let thy servant depart in peace—*for I didn't.*"

Then, seeing her eye going back to his ridiculous duds: "These? These are triumph. I've tan shoes on—please note that—with a stovepipe and a Prince-Albert. The well-dressed poet will wear them so from now on. 'They say Will Todd did it.' They're waking up, Mary; the creeping critics and the crawling editors. They're coming to life, Mary; the hound-belly publishers, sniffing up the wind."

It was Mary, fetched across the grass by a swift suspicion, that was doing the sniffing. But there was no whisky smell about him; he wasn't drunk. Another and worse doubt assailed her.

"Will, you're not at all—you ought to be in your bed this instant ——"

He overrode her, head thrown back, a crimson halo in his hair.

"To-day is only the beginning, Mary. To-morrow the boat won't be able to hold them—and their money-bags." He laughed aloud. "Money-bags—for Will!" Words wouldn't do; he wanted to sweep some gesture that would include not only them but his own funny self in his Olympian raillery, and he took one hand from the bench-back to do it with. This was a mistake. Down he began to go like a ruined tower, and would have been on the grass had Mary not grabbed and caught him.

"Anna!" she gasped, glimpsing the Bease at the house-corner. "Dumbhead!"

It seemed an interminable way around to the other

side of the bench, where they could dump him down and hold him propped between them.

"What are we to do, Anna?"

"And a man knockin' at the front door all the while too, as I seen him, comin' the side way."

"Wh-wh—*what?*" Mary saw things swimming. "I—I—I must—run."

But when she let Will go he lopped toward her. He did beat all! It was uncanny, the ways he could find.

"Anna, you run. Tell the gentleman to wait; I'll come directly."

Alone with the wooden fellow, between impotence and exasperation she could have slapped him had she not been afraid. Pleading was better.

"Oh, try, Will!"

She leaned nearer then, for he was speaking.

"Mary dear, listen. If it's another of those publishing fellows ——"

She didn't know whether to laugh or to weep. "I've got to go for a moment, Will. I'll be back quickly—truly. Now, *won't* you try to sit *up?*"

He appeared to realize for the first time that an effort was required of him. He made it, stiffening his arms out like struts and turning his stare back at the sun, almost to the hills now, red as an ember, and swollen.

"The devil you will!" he muttered at it. "Go on down!"

She went on tiptoe, fearful of breathing or of looking back, for a sense of guilt she had never reckoned on weighted her feet like lead. With craft she fought it: "He's quite all right." And bitterly: "What is it to me?"

But it was too strong for her; she did turn and she did look. And seeing him propped there between his own arms, staring silently into the sunset, tears of a sudden blistered her eyes. "It's all right, though: he's death on bears, and he can blowhard." And it was his birthday, and she hadn't given him a gift. She ran back and threw an arm around his shoulders.

"*Don't* look so, Will! You've done so famously. You've written so many pretty, pretty, *really* pretty poems! I'm proud of you, Will!"

The ghost of a wistful smile moved on his lips.

"And it's my birthday, Mary?"

"No, silly! Won't you ever know your own true worth?"

"Thank you, Mary Drake."

How glad then she was that she had done it! The lead had fallen from her feet and she could run. Not through the house, however. She heard the sound of steps on cobbles, and, hurrying by the side yard, she came to the gate and leaned out and called "Yes?" into the down-street dusk, where some one, tired before Anna had answered the door, was leaving.

"Yes?" she called again, more loudly, with prickles at her temples.

Thank God, he heard this time.

"Is that you, Mary Drake?"

Nathan came back. In the twilight that began to thicken swiftly now they exchanged greetings across the iron spearheads of the gate, oddly dragging them out, too preoccupied for real words yet in taking stock, each one, of the stranger the years had made of the other.

Nathan had lost his hair and grown quite heavy—not in any one place, but all over, and to his neck and head—heavy and a little soft. It came as a shock to Mary, who had carried another picture, even though she might have expected it. But then, quickly, relief and a tristful gratitude filled her heart. Beggars can't be choosers, and he couldn't so much mind now the iron ribbons in her hair.

Presently she began to feel another misgiving. She hardly knew what it was. But it was somewhere in the subtle change in *his* preoccupation. He had ceased to study her; his desultory words wandered still more, and so did his eyes.

"By the way," he said, and reddened. "Will Todd's here with you?"

There it was—out!

"Nathan! I—you don't——" If she had had any warning, any warning at all!

"I was told in the village here——"

"You were told. They tell so many things 'in the village here.' "

She was talking like a hurt and bewildered school girl, and she knew it, and couldn't help it; she was so bewildered and so hurt. And the worst of the hurt was that it should be Nathan, the noble, the straightforward, who should think what he evidently thought, and go at it in the flushed, averted way he did. Before she could stop it a traitor word flashed across her consciousness. "I'd like to see Will Todd doing a thing like this." That scared her. She made haste to talk, no matter at what random.

"I wish you'd come in, Nathan. I do want to hear about what you're doing—about the new books—there must be some new ones lately?"

Nathan *was* queer. It *wasn't* just embarrassment.

"No, not any lately." He laughed softly, more in bitterness than in mirth. "I've discovered after some years that the money in literature, the big money, is in the publishing end. I—I'm a publisher now."

How funny! ("Mary dear, if it's another of those publishing fellows ——")

Nathan was casting about again, more in a hole than ever.

"Mary—frankly. This man Borus, of Borus & Low, has he been here yet?"

"I'm not acquainted— Wait! Is he by any chance—a publisher *too?*

"Why, yes."

How funny! No, it was funnier than that. It was as funny as if the world that Mary had known

for forty years had decided, before her eyes, to turn itself wrong side out. She was smitten by a dizzy doubt.

"Nathan, it's *Will* you've come to see."

Granger was a gentleman, even if he was a little tired and a little soft.

"Uh—yes, Mary. But I wanted to see you first."

Mary laughed, and the extraordinary thing was that it was pure laughter. Incredible; but between two winks she knew for truth that she didn't care.

"And why *me?*"

"To thank you. There'll be lots; I'd rather like to be the first one."

"Thank me for—what?"

"For doing what you've done for the only man among us all that's had the nerve to walk on—ahead."

"Do you mean ——"

"I'd have known it of you, Mary. Your mother was the *grande dame* because hers was the time for *grandes dames*, and not yet for pioneers again. If it had been, I'll bet she too would have been loading the old muskets and binding up the arrow-wounds."

"But I've done *nothing*, Nathan." And there was a real wail in it. "I've—really—I've never done anything—anything but cheer him up a little when he was down—or—or—ill."

With that word, she remembered. ("I'll be back quickly—truly.") What was she thinking and what was she doing all this time?

Swinging the gate open, she turned back along the walk to the garden, leaving Nathan to follow as he would.

She began to walk faster. It was so dark.

"Will!" she called. She commenced to run. "*Will Todd—answer me!*"

But there was no answer. Will Todd had won the endurance contest; he had made the sun go down.

Between them they carried him in and up the back stairs. Mary felt no weight. The house was like a strange house, and she was stunned and dreadfully confused. When Nathan asked "Where?" she nodded at the first door open into the hall. "In there of course." It was the big south chamber. There they laid their burden on the bed.

At sixty Mary Drake has not aged particularly, save that her hair is white, and so is even fitter to the quality of her quiet beauty and her patrician poise. And if these things came down to her from her forebears, the mantle that is about her of a whispered and historic romance is her own.

She is proud of her island and her town. On Summer Wednesdays she is pleased to let the world into the house where Will Todd lived and worked, and allow it to stand for a moment beside the bed in which he died. The quarters in the box in the lower hall are given to the Island Hospital.

Something else came down to Mary from the Dear-

borns and the Drakes, a regard for the literal truth. She has never once said of the big, sunny south chamber, with its door half open into the duskier mysteries of her own, that it was Will Todd's room. She has never said any but the literal truth: "These are his things."

A pair of quilted slippers under the bed; some clothing in the closet; on the broad walnut table between the warm windows, beside the "Island Edition" of his works, an ink-well, a few uncrumpled trial-sheets of "The Two Houses" manuscript, and a couple of bitten pens. And the silver plaque given by the Poetry Society of America on the twentieth anniversary of his death:

Don't talk to me about Beauty; I'm the lad that creates it . . .
I am of instants; I am the two-legged emperor of instants . . .
I am Man . . .

IV

FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO

When Christopher Kain told me his story, sitting late in his dressing-room at the Philharmonic, I felt that I ought to say something, but nothing in the world seemed adequate. It was one of those times when words have no weight; mine sounded like a fly buzzing in the tomb of kings. And after all, he did not hear me; I could tell that by the look on his face as he sat there staring into the light, the lank, dark hair framing his waxen brow, his shoulders hanging forward, his lean, strong, sentient fingers wrapped around the brown neck of "Ugo," the 'cello, tightly.

Agnes Kain was a lady, as a lady was before the light of that poor worn word went out. Quiet, reserved, gracious, continent, bearing in face and form the fragile beauty of a rose-petal come to its fading on a windless ledge, she moved down the years with the steadfast sweetness of the gentlewoman—gentle, and a woman.

They did not know much about her in the city, where she had come with her son. They did not need to. Looking into her eyes, into the transparent soul behind them, they could ask no other credential for

the name she bore and the lavender she wore for the husband of whom she never spoke.

She spoke of him, indeed, but that was in privacy, and to her son. As Christopher grew through boyhood, she watched him; in her enveloping eagerness she forestalled the hour when he would have asked, and told him about his father, Daniel Kain.

It gave them the added bond of secret-sharers. The tale grew as the boy grew. Each night when Christopher crept into his mother's bed for the quiet hour of her voice, it was as if he crept into another world, the wind-blown, sky-encompassed kingdom of the Kains, Daniel, his father, and Maynard, *his* father, another Maynard before *him*, and all the Kains—and the Hill and the House, the Willow Wood, the Moor Under the Cloud, the Beach where the gray seas pounded, the boundless Marsh, the Lilac-hedge standing against the stars.

He knew he would have to be a man of men to measure up to that heritage, a man strong, grave, thoughtful, kind with the kindness that never falters, brave with the courage of that dark and massive folk whose blood ran in his veins. Coming as it did, a world of legend growing up side by side with the matter-of-fact world of Concord Street, it was made to fit in with all things natural, and it never occurred to him to question. He, the boy, was *not* massive, strong, or brave; he saw things in the dark that fright-

ened him, his thin shoulders were bound to droop, the hours of practice on his violin left him with no blood in his legs and a queer pallor on his brow.

Nor was he always grave, thoughtful, kind. He did not often lose his temper; the river of his young life ran too smooth and deep. But there were times when he did. Brief passions swept him, blinded him, twisted his fingers, left him sobbing, retching, and weak as death itself. He never seemed to wonder at the discrepancy in things, however, any more than he wondered at the look in his mother's eyes, as she hung over him, waiting, in those moments of nausea after rage. She had not the look of the gentlewoman then; she had more the look, a thousand times, of the prisoner led through the last gray corridor in the dawn.

He saw her like that once when he had not been angry. It was on a day when he came into the front hall unexpectedly as a stranger was going out of the door. The stranger was dressed in rough, brown homespun; in one hand he held a brown velour hat, in the other a thorn stick without a ferrule. Nor was there anything more worthy of note in his face, an average-long face with hollowed cheeks, sunken gray eyes, and a high forehead, narrow, sallow, and moist.

No, it was not the stranger that troubled Christopher. It was his mother's look at his own blundering entrance, and, when the man was out of hearing, the tremulous haste of her explanation.

"He came about some papers, you know."

"You mean our *Morning Posts?*" Christopher asked her.

She let her breath out all at once, and color flooded her face.

"Yes," she told him. "Yes, yes."

Neither of them said anything more about it.

It was that same day, toward evening, that Christopher broke one of his long silences, reverting to a subject always near to them both.

"Mother, you've never told me where it is—on the *map*, I mean."

She was looking the other way. She did not turn around.

"I—Chris—I—I haven't a map in the house."

He did not press the matter. He went out into the back yard presently, under the grape-trellis, and there he stood still for a long time, staring at nothing in particular.

He was growing up.

He went away to boarding-school not long after this, taking with him the picture of his adored mother, the treasured epic of his dark, strong fathers, his narrow shoulders, his rare, blind bursts of passion, his new-born wonder, and his violin. At school they thought him a queer one.

The destinies of men are unaccountable things. Five children in the village of Deer Bay came down with

diphtheria. That was why the academy shut up for a week, and that was what started Christopher on his way home for an unexpected holiday. And then it was only by one chance in a thousand that he should glimpse his mother's face in the down-train halted at the Junction where he himself was changing.

She did not see him till he came striding along the aisle of her coach, his arms full of his things, face flushed, eyes brimming with the surprise and pleasure of seeing her, lips trembling questions.

"Why, Mother, what on earth? Where are you going? I'm to have a week at least, Mother; and here you're going away, and you didn't tell me, and what is it, and everything?"

His eager voice trailed off. The color drained out of his face, and there was a shadow in his eyes. He drew back from her the least way.

"What is it, Mother? *Mother!*"

Somewhere on the platform outside the conductor's droning "—*board*" ran along the coaches. Agnes Kain opened her white lips.

"Get off before it's too late, Christopher. I haven't time to explain now. Go home, and Mary will see you have everything. I'll be back in a day or so. Kiss me, and go quickly. Quickly!"

He did not kiss her. He would not have kissed her for worlds. He was too bewildered, dazed, lost, too inexpressibly hurt. On the platform outside, had she

turned ever so little to look, she might have seen his face again for an instant as the wheels ground on the rails. Color was coming back to it again, a murky color like the shadow of a red cloud.

They must have wondered, in the coach with her, at the change in the calm, unobtrusive, well-gowned gentlewoman, their fellow-passenger. Those that were left after another two hours saw her get down at a barren station where an old man waited in a carriage. The halt was brief, and none of them caught sight of the boyish figure that slipped down from the rearmost coach to take shelter for himself and his dark, tempest-ridden face behind the shed at the end of the platform ——

Christopher walked out across a broad, high, cloudy plain, following a red road, led by the dust-feather hanging over the distant carriage.

He walked for miles, creeping ant-like between the immensities of the brown plain and the tumbled sky. Had he been less implacable, less intent, he might have noticed many things: the changing conformation of the clouds, the far flight of a gull, the new perfume and texture of the wind that flowed over his hot temples. But as it was, the sea took him by surprise. Coming over a little rise, his eyes focused for another long, dun fold of the plain, it seemed for an instant as if he had lost his balance above a void; for a wink he felt the passing of a strange sickness. He went off a

little way to the side of the road and sat down on a flat stone.

The world had become of a sudden infinitely simple, as simple as the inside of a cup. The land broke down under him, a long, naked slope fringed at the foot by a ribbon of woods. Through the upper branches he saw the shingles and chimneys of a pale gray village clinging to a white beach, a beach which ran up to the left in a border flight of cliffs, showing on their crest a cluster of roofs and dull green gable-ends against the sea that lifted vast, unbroken, to the rim of the cup.

Christopher was fifteen, and queer even for that queer age. He had a streak of the girl in him at his adolescence, and, as he sat there in a huddle, the wind coming out of this huge new gulf of life seemed to pass through him, bone and tissue, and tears rolled down his face.

The carriage bearing his strange mother was gone, from sight and from mind. His eyes came down from the lilac-crowned hill to the beach, where it showed in white patches through the wood, and he saw that the wood was of willows. And he remembered the plain behind him, the wide, brown moor under the cloud. He got up on his wobbly legs. There were stones all about him in the whispering wire-grass, and like them the one he had been sitting on bore a blurred inscription. He read it aloud, for some reason, his voice borne away faintly on the river of air:

MAYNARD KAIN, ESQUIRE
1809—1839

This Monument Erected In His Memory by His Sorrowing Widow,
Harriet Burnam Kain

"The windy Gales of the West Indies
Laid Claim to His Noble Soul
And Took him on High to his Creator
Who made him Whole."

His gaze went on to another of those worn stones.

Here Lie The Earthly Remains Of
MAYNARD KAIN, SECOND
Born 1835—Died 1863 For the Preservation of the Union

There was no moss or lichen on this wind-scored slope. In the falling dusk the old white stones stood up like the bones of the dead themselves, and the only sound was the rustle of the wire-grass creeping over them in a dry tide. The boy had taken off his cap; the sea-wind moving under the mat of his damp hair gave it the look of some somber, outlandish cowl. With the night coming on, his solemnity had an elfin quality. He found at last what he was looking for, and his fingers had to help his eyes.

DANIEL KAIN
Beloved Husband of Agnes Willoughby Kain
Born 1860—Died 1886
"Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Christopher Kain told me that he left the naked graveyard repeating it to himself, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," conscious less of the words than of the august rhythm falling in with the pulse of his exaltation.

THE velvet darkness that hangs under clouds had come down over the hills and the great marsh stretching away to the south of it. Agnes Kain stood in the open doorway, one hand on the brown wood, the other pressed to her cheek.

"You heard it *that* time, Nelson?"

"No, ma'am." The old man in the entrance-hall behind her shook his head. In the thin, blown light of the candelabra which he held high, the worry and doubt of her deepened on his singularly unlined face.

"And you might well catch your death in that draft, ma'am."

But she only continued to stare out between the pillars where the lilac-hedge made a wall of deeper blackness across the night.

"What am I thinking of?" she whispered, and then: "*There!*"

And this time the old man heard it; a nearer, wind-blown hail.

"Mother! Oh, Mother!"

The boy came striding through the gap of the gate in the hedge.

"It's I, Mother! Chris! Aren't you surprised?"

She had no answer. As he came she turned and moved away from the door, and the old man, peering from under the flat candle-flames, saw her face like wax. And he saw the boy, Christopher, in the doorway, his hands flung out, his face transfigured.

"Mother! I'm here! Don't you understand?"

He touched her shoulder. She turned to him, as it were lazily.

"Yes," she breathed. "I see."

He threw his arms about her, and felt her shaking from head to foot. But he was shaking, too.

"I knew the way!" he cried. "I knew it, Mother, I knew it! I came down from the Moor and there was the Willow Wood, and I knew the way home. And when I came, Mother, it was like the trees bowing down their branches in the dark. And when I came by the Beach, Mother, it was like a roll of drums, beating for me, and when I came to the Hill I saw the Hedge standing against the sky, and I came, and here I am!"

She expressed no wonder, asked no question.

"Yes," was all she said, and it was as if she spoke of a tree coming to its leaf, the wind to its height, the tide to its flood.

Had he been less rapt and triumphant he must have wondered more at that icy lassitude, and at the cloak of ceremony she wrapped about her to hide a terror. It was queer to hear the chill urbanity of her: "This is Christopher, Nelson; Christopher, this is your

father's servant, Nelson." It was queerer still to see the fastidious decorum with which she led him over this, the familiar house of his fathers.

He might have been a stranger, come with a guide-book in his hand. When he stood on his heels in the big drawing-room, staring up with all his eyes at the likenesses of those men he had known so well, it was strange to hear her going on with all the patter of the gallery attendant, names of painters, prices, dates. He stood before the portrait of Daniel Kain, his father, a dark-skinned, longish face with a slightly protruding nether lip, hollow temples, and a round chin, deeply cleft. As in all the others, the eyes, even in the dead pigment, seemed to shine with an odd, fixed luminosity of their own, and like the others from first to last of the line, it bore upon it the stamp of an imperishable youth. And all the while he stood there, drinking it in, detail by detail, his mother spoke, not of the face, but of the frame, some obscure and unsuspected excellence in the goldleaf on the frame.

More than once in that stately tour of halls and chambers he found himself protesting gaily, "I know, Mother! I know, I know!"

But the contagion of his glory did not seem to touch her. Nothing seemed to touch her. Only once was the fragile, bright shell of her punctilio penetrated for a moment, and that was when Christopher, lagging, turned back to a door they were about to pass and threw it open with the happy laugh of a discoverer.

And then, even before she could have hushed him, the laughter on his lips died of itself.

A man lay on a bed in the room, his face as colorless and still as the pillow behind it. His eyes were open, but they did not move from the three candles burning on the high bureau, and he seemed unconscious of any intrusion.

"I didn't know!" Christopher whispered, shocked, and shamed.

When the door was closed again his mother explained. She explained at length, concisely, standing quite still, with one frail, fine hand worrying the locket she wore at her throat. Nelson stood quite still too, his attention engrossed in his candle-wicks. And Christopher stood quite still, and all their shadows —— That man was the caretaker, the man, Christopher was to understand, who had been looking after the place. His name was Sanderson. He had fallen ill, very ill. In fact he was dying. And that was why Christopher's mother had to come down, post-haste, without warning. To see about some papers. Some papers. Christopher was to understand ——

Christopher understood. Indeed there was not much to understand. And yet, when they had gone on, he was bothered by it. Already, so young he was, so ruthless, and so romantic, he had begun to be a little ashamed of that fading, matter-of-fact world of Concord Street. And it was with just that world which he wished to forget that the man lying ill in the candle-

lit chamber was linked in Christopher's memory. For it was the same man he had seen in the doorway that morning months ago, with a brown hat in one hand and a thorn stick in the other.

Even a thing like that may be half put aside, though —for a while. And by the time Christopher went to his room for the night, the thought of the interloper had returned into the back of his mind, and they were all Kains there on the Hill, inheritors of Romance. He found himself bowing to his mother with a courtliness he had never known, and an "I wish you a good night," sounding a century old on his lips. He saw the remote, patrician figure bow as gravely in return, a petal of color as hard as paint on the whiteness of either cheek. He did not see her afterward, though—when the merciful door was closed.

Before he slept he explored the chamber, touching old objects with reverent finger-tips. He came on a leather case like an absurdly overgrown beetle, hidden in a corner, and a violoncello was in it. He had seen such things before, but he had never touched one, and when he lifted it from the case he had a moment of feeling very odd at the pit of his stomach. Sitting in his under-things on the edge of the bed, he held the wine-colored creature in the crook of his arm for a long time, the look in his round eyes, half eagerness, half pain, of one pursuing the shadow of some ghostly and elusive memory.

He touched the C-string by-and-by with an adven-

turing thumb. I have heard "Ugo" sing, myself, and I know what Christopher meant when he said that the sound did not come *out* of the instrument, but that it came *in* to it, sweeping home from all the walls and corners of the chamber, a slow, rich, concentric wind of tone. He felt it about him, murmurous, pulsating, like the sound of surf borne from some far-off coast.

And then it was like drums, still farther off. And then it was the feet of marching men, massive, dark, grave men with luminous eyes, and the stamp on their faces of an imperishable youth.

He sat there so lost and rapt that he heard nothing of his mother's footsteps hurrying in the hall; knew nothing till he saw her face in the open doorway. She had forgotten herself this time; that fragile defense of gentility was down. For a moment they stared at each other across a gulf of silence, and little by little the boy's cheeks grew as white as hers, his hands as cold, his lungs as empty of breath.

"What is it, Mother?"

"Oh, Christopher, Christopher —— Go to bed, dear."

He did not know why, but of a sudden he felt ashamed and a little frightened, and, blowing out the candle, he crept under the covers.

The afternoon was bright with a rare sun, and the world was quiet. Christopher lay full-spread on the

turf, listening idly to the "clip-clop" of Nelson's shears as the old man trimmed the hedge.

"And was my father *very* strong?" he asked with a drowsy pride.

"No, not so very." Nelson stopped clipping and was immediately lost in the past.

"Only when he was *that* way five strong men couldn't turn him. I'll say that. No, if they had to get him with a shotgun that day, 'twas nobody's fault nor sin. If Guy Bullard seen Daniel there on the sand with an ax in his hand and foam-like on his lips, and the little ones cornered where he caught them between cliff and water—Guy's own baby amongst them—and knowing the sickness of the Kains as he and everybody else did—why, I'm free and willing to say 'twas his bounden duty to hold a true aim and pull a steady trigger on Daniel, man of his though I was, and man of his poor father before him ——"

Nelson was a queer fellow. His age was really greater than his unlined face would have told, and his mind, laden with the burden of misty years, had grown tired. It is charitable to think that, once launched on the river of memory, the dreaming fellow forgot where he was and to what audience he spoke, that audience lying quiet, so very quiet, in the deep grass behind his back.

"No, I can't make it right to lay blame on any man for it, no more than I can on them, his brother officers,

that broke Maynard's neck with their tent-pegs the night after Gettysburg. No, no ——"

It was evidently a time-worn theme, an argument, an *apologia*, accepted after years of bitterness and self-searching. He went on with the remote serenity of age, that has escaped the toils of passion, pursuing the old, worn path of his mind, his eyes buried in vacancy.

"No, 'twas a mercy to the both of them, father and son, and a man must see it so. 'Twould be better of course if they could have gone easier, same as the *old* Maynard went, thinking himself the Lord our God to walk on the water and calm the West Indy gale. That's better, better for all hands round. But if it had to come so, in violence and fear, then nobody need feel the sin of it on his soul—nobody excepting the old man Bickers, him that told Daniel. For 'twas from that day he began to take it on.

"I saw it myself. There was Daniel come home from other parts where his mother had kept him, out of gossip's way, bright as you please and knowing nothing wrong with the blood of the Kains. And so I say the sin lays on the loose-wagging tongue of Bickers, for from the day he let it out to Daniel, Daniel changed. 'Twas like he'd heard his doom, and went to it. Bickers is dead a long time now, but may the Lord God lay eternal damnation on his soul!"

Even then there was no heat; the curse had grown a formula. Having come to the end, the old man's

eyes tumbled down painlessly out of the void and discovered the shears in his hand.

"Dear me, that's so," he said to himself. One thought was enough at a time. He fell to work again. The steady "clip-clip-clip" moved off slowly along the hedge. Not once did he remember; not once as the indefatigable worker shuffled himself out of sight around the house did he look back with any stirring of recollection at the boyish figure lying there as still as a shadow cast in tne deep grass.

A FAINTLY lopsided moon swam in the zenith. For three days now that rare clarity had hung in the sky, and for three nights the moon had grown. Its benign, poisonous illumination flowed down steeply through the windows of the dark chamber where Christopher huddled on the bed's edge, three pale, chill islands spread on the polished floor.

Once again the boy brought the bow home across the shivering strings, and, as if ears could be thirsty as a drunkard's throat, he drank his fill of the 'cello's deep, full-membered chord. The air was heavy with the resonance of marching feet, ghostly feet marching and marching down upon him in slow, inexorable crescendo as the tides ebbed later among the sedges on the marsh and the moon grew big. And above the pulse of the march he seemed to hear another cadence, a thin laughter.

He laughed too, giving himself up to that spectral

contagion. He saw the fat, iridescent bubble with the Hill in it, the House of his dreams, the Beach and the Moor and Willow Wood of fancy, and all the grave, strong, gentle line of Kains to whom he had been made bow down in worship. He saw himself taken in, soul and body, by a thin-plated fraud, a cheap trick of mother's words, as, before him, his father had been. And the faint exhalations from the moon-patches on the floor showed his face contorted with a still, set grimace of mirth.

Anger came over him in a white veil, twitching his lips and his toes and bending his fingers in knots. Through the veil a sound crept, a sound he knew well by this time, secret footfalls in the hall, faltering, retreating, loitering, returning to lag near the door.

How he hated her! It is curious that not once did his passion turn against his blighted fathers; it was against the woman who had borne him, the babe, and lied to him, the boy—against her, and against that man, that interloper, dying in a room below.

The thought that had been willing to creep out of sight into the back-country of his mind on that first night, came out now like a red, devouring cloud. Who was that man?

What was he dying of—or *supposed* to be dying of? What had he been doing that morning in Concord Street? What was he doing here, in the house of the men who would never grow old? Why had his mother

come down here, where he was, so queerly, so secretly, so frightened?

Christopher would have liked to kill that man. He shivered and licked his lips. He would have liked to do something bloody and abominable to that face with the hollow cheeks, the sunken gray eyes, and the forehead, high, sallow, and moist. He would have liked to take an ax in his hand and run along the thundering beach and catch that face in a corner somewhere between cliff and water. The desire to do this thing possessed him and blinded him like the kiss of lightning.

He found himself on the floor at the edge of the moonlight, full of weakness and nausea. He felt himself weeping as he crawled back to the bed, his cheeks and neck bathed in a flood of painless tears. He threw himself down, dazed with exhaustion.

It seemed to him that his mother had been calling a long while. "Christopher! What is it? What is it, boy?"

He had heard no footsteps, going or coming; she must have been there all the time, waiting, listening, her ear pressed to the thick, old paneling of the door. The thought was like wine; the torment of her whispering was sweet in his ears.

"Oh, Chris, Chris! You're making yourself sick!"

"Yes," he said. He lifted on an elbow and repeated it in a voice which must have sounded strange enough to the listener beyond the door. "Yes!" he said. "Yes!"

"Go away!" he cried of a sudden, making a wide, dim, imperious gesture in the dark.

"No, no," the imploring whisper crept in. "You're making yourself sick—Christopher—all over nothing—nothing in the world. It's so foolish—so foolish—foolish! Oh, if I could only tell you, Christopher—if I could tell you ——"

"Tell me *what?*" He shuddered with the ecstasy of his own irony. "Who that man is? That 'caretaker'? What he's doing here? What *you're* doing here? ——" He began to scream in a high, brittle voice: "*Go away from that door! Go away!*"

This time she obeyed. He heard her retreating, soft-footed and frightened, along the hall. She was abandoning him—without so much as trying the door, just once again, to see if it were still bolted against her.

She did not care. She was sneaking off—down the stairs—Oh, yes, he knew where.

His lips began to twitch again and his finger-nails scratched on the bed-clothes. If only he had something, some weapon, an ax, a broad, keen, glittering ax! He would show them! He was strong, incredibly strong! Five men could not have turned him back from what he was going to do—if only he had something.

His hand, creeping, groping, closed on the neck of the 'cello leaning by the bed. He laughed.

Oh, yes, he would stop her from going down there; he would hold her, just where she was on the dark

stair, nerveless, breathless, as long as he liked; if he liked he would bring her back, cringing, begging.

He drew the bow, and laughed higher and louder yet to hear the booming discord rocking in upon him from the shadows. Swaying from side to side he lashed the hollow creature to madness. They came in the press of the gale, marching, marching, the wild, dark pageant of his fathers, nearer and nearer through the moon-struck night.

"Tell me *what?*" he laughed. "*What?*"

And abruptly he slept, sprawled cross-wise on the covers, half-clothed, dishevelled, triumphant.

It was not the same night, but another, whether the next or the next but one, or two, Christopher can not say. But he was out of doors.

He had escaped from the house at dusk; he knew that. He remembered the wide, hushed mystery of twilight as he paused on the door-sill between the fading pillars, the death of day running crimson in the west; in the east the still, white travail of the sea and the moon—the queer moment.

He had run away, through the hedge and down the back side of the hill, torn between the two, the death, warm and red like life, and the birth, pale, chill, and inexorable as death.

Most of that daft night-running will always be blank in Christopher's mind; moments, and moments only, like islands of clarity, remain. He brings back

one vivid interval when he found himself seated on his father's gravestone among the whispering grasses, staring down into the pallid bowl of the world. And in that moment he knew what Daniel Kain had felt, and Maynard Kain before him; a passionate and contemptuous hatred for all the dullards in the world who never dreamed dreams or saw visions or sang wordless songs or ran naked-hearted in the flood of the full-blown moon. He hated them because they could not by any possibility comprehend his magnificent separation, his starry sanity, his—kinship with the gods. And he had a new thirst to obliterate the whole creeping race of dust-dwellers with one wide, incomparably-bloody gesture.

It was late when he found himself back again before the house, and an ink-black cloud touched the moon's edge. After the airless evening a wind had sprung up in the east; it thrashed among the lilac-stems as he came through them and across the turf, silent-footed as an Indian. In his right hand he had a bread-knife, held butt to thumb, dagger-wise. Where he had come by the rust-bitten thing no one knows, least of all himself. In the broken light his eyes shown with a curious luminosity of their own, absorbed, introspective.

All the windows were dark, and the entrance-hall, when he slipped in between the pillars; but across its floor he saw light thrown in a yellow ribbon from the half-closed door of the drawing-room.

It took his attention, laid hands on his imagination. He began to struggle against it.

He would *not* go into that room. He was going to *another* room. To stay him, he made a picture of that other room in his tumbled mind—the high, bleak walls, the bureau with the three candles burning wanly, the bed, the face of the man on the bed. And when his rebellious feet, surrendering him up to the lure of that beckoning ribbon, had edged as far as the door, and he had pushed it a little further ajar to get his head in, he saw that the face itself was there in the drawing-room.

He stood there for some time, his shoulder pressed against the door-jamb, his eyes blinking.

His slow attention moved from the face to the satin pillows that wedged it in, and then to the woman that must have been his mother, kneeling beside the casket with her arms crooked on the shining cover and her head down between them. And across from her leaned "Ugo," the 'cello, come down from his chamber to stand vigil at the other shoulder of the dead.

The first thing that came into his groping mind was a bitter sense of abandonment. The little core of candle-light hanging in the gloom left him out. Its unstirring occupants, the woman, the 'cello, and the clay, seemed sufficient to themselves. His mother had forgotten him. Even "Ugo," that had grown part and parcel of his madness, had forgotten him.

Bruised, sullen, moved by some deep-lying instinct

of the clan, his eyes left them and sought the wall beyond, where there were those who would not forget him, come what might, blood of his blood and mind of his own queer mind. And there among the shadowed faces he searched for one in vain. As if that candle-lit tableau, somehow holy and somehow abominable, were not for the eyes of one of them, the face of Daniel, the wedded husband, had been turned to the wall.

Here was something definite, something Christopher could take hold of, and something that *he would not have.*

His mother seemed not to have known he was near till he flung the door back and came stalking into the light with the rusty bread-knife in his hand. None would have imagined there was blood enough left in her wasted heart, but her face went crimson when she lifted it and saw him.

It brought him up short—the blush, where he had looked for fright. It shocked him, and, shocking him, more than by a thousand labored words of explanation it opened a window in his disordered brain. He stood gawking with the effort of thought, hardly conscious of his mother's cry.

"Christopher, I never meant you to know!"

He kept on staring at the ashen face between the pillows, long (as his own was long), sensitive, worn; and at the 'cello keeping incorruptible vigil over its dead. And then slowly his eyes went down to his own

left hand, to which that same old wine-brown creature had come home from the first with a curious sense of fitness and authority and right.

"Who is this man?"

"Don't look at me so! Don't, Chris!"

But he did look at her. Preoccupied as he was, he was appalled at sight of the damage the half-dozen days had done. She had been so much the lady, so perfectly the gentlewoman. To no one had the outward gesture and symbol of purity been more precious. No whisper had ever breathed against her. If there had been secrets behind her, they had been dead; if a skeleton, the closet had been closed. And now, looking down on her, he was not only appalled, he was a little sickened, as one might be to find squalor and decay creeping into a familiar and once immaculate room.

"Who is this man?" he repeated.

"He grew up with me." She half raised herself on her knees in the eagerness of her appeal. "We were boy and girl together at home in Maryland. We were meant for each other, Chris. We were always to marry —always, Chris. And when I went away, and when I married your—when I married Daniel Kain, *he* hunted and he searched and he found me here. He was with me, he stood by me through that awful year—and—that was how it happened. I tell you, Christopher, darling, we were meant for each other. John Sanderson and I. He loved me more than poor Daniel

ever did or could, loved me enough to throw away a life of promise, just to hang on here after every one else was gone, alone with his 'cello and his one little memory. And I loved him enough to—to—*Christopher, don't look at me so!*"

His eyes did not waver. You must remember his age, the immaculate, ruthless, mid-Victorian 'teens; and you must remember his bringing-up.

"And so this was my father," he said. And then he went on without waiting, his voice breaking into falsetto with the fierceness of his charge. "And you would have kept on lying to me! If I hadn't happened, just happened to find you here, now, you would have gone on keeping me in the dark! You would have stood by and seen me—well—go *crazy!* Yes, go crazy, thinking I was—well, thinking I was meant for it! And all to save your precious ——"

She was down on the floor again, what was left of the gentlewoman, wailing.

"But you don't know what it means to a woman, Chris! You don't know what it means to a woman!"

A wave of rebellion brought her up and she strained toward him across the coffin.

"Isn't it something, then, that I gave you a father with a *mind?* And if you think you've been sinned against, think of *me!* Sin! You call it *sin!* Well, isn't it *anything at all* that by my 'sin' my son's blood came down to him *clean?* Tell me that!"

He shook himself, and his flame turned to sullenness.

"It's not so," he glowered.

All the girl in him, the poet, the hero-worshiping boy, rebelled. His harassed eyes went to the wall beyond and the faces there, the ghosts of the doomed, glorious, youth-ridden line, priceless possessions of his dreams. He would not lose them; he refused to be robbed of a tragic birthright. He wanted some gesture puissant enough to turn back and blot out all that had been told him.

"It's not his!" he cried. And reaching out fiercely he dragged the 'cello away from the coffin's side. He stood for an instant at bay, bitter, defiant.

"It's not his! It's mine. It's—it's—*ours!*"

And then he fled out into the dark of the entrance-hall and up the black stairs. In his room there was no moonlight now, for the cloud ran over the sky, and the rain had come.

"It isn't so, it isn't so!" It was like a sob in his throat.

He struck on the full strings. And listening—breathless—through the dying discord he heard—the liquid whispers of the rain, nothing more. He lashed with a wild bow, time and again. But something was broken, something was lost; out of the surf of sound he could no longer fashion the measure of marching feet. The mad Kains had found him out, and cast him out. No longer could he dream them in dreams or

run naked-hearted with them in the flood of the moon, for he was no blood of theirs, and they were gone. And huddling down on the edge of the bed, he wept.

The tears washed his eyes and falling down bathed his strengthless hands. And beyond the fantom windows, over the Marsh and the Moor and the Hill that were not his, the graves of strangers and the lost Willow Wood, lay the healing rain. He heard it in gurgling rivulets along the gutters overhead. He heard the soft impact, like a kiss, brushing the reedy cheeks of the Marsh, the showery shouldering of branches, the aspiration of myriad drinking grasses, the far whisper of waters coming home to the waters of the sea—the long, low melody of the rain.

And by and by he found it was "Ugo," the 'cello, and he was playing.

THEY WENT home the following afternoon, he and his mother. Or, rather, she went home, and he with her as far as the Junction, where he changed for school.

They had not much to say to each other through the journey. The boy had to be given time. Five years younger, or fifteen years older, it would have been easier for him to look at his mother. You must remember what his mother had meant to him, and what, bound up still in the fierce and somber battle of adolescence, she must mean to him now.

As for Agnes Kain, she did not look at him, either. Through the changing hours her eyes rested on the

transparent hands lying crossed in her lap. She seemed very tired and very white. Her hair was done up less tidily, her lace cuffs were less fresh than they had been wont to be. About her whole presence there was a troubling hint of let-down, something obscurely slatternly, a kind of awkward and unlovely nakedness.

She really spoke to him for the first time at the Junction, when he stood before her, slim and uncouth under the huge burden of "Ugo," fumbling through his leave-taking.

"Christopher," she said. "Try not to think of me—always—as—as—well, when you're older, Christopher, you'll know what I mean."

That was the last time he ever heard her speak. He saw her once again—two days later—but the telegram was delayed and his train was late, and when he came beside her bed she said nothing. She looked into his eyes searchingly—for a long while—and died.

THAT space stands for the interval of silence that fell after Christopher had told me the story. I thought he had quite finished. He sat motionless, his shoulders fallen forward, his eyes fixed in the heart of the incandescent globe over the dressing-table, his long fingers wrapped around the neck of the 'cello.

"And so she got me through those years," he said. "Those nip-and-tuck years that followed. By her lie."

"Insanity is a queer thing," he went on, still brood-

ing into the light. "There's more of it about than we're apt to think. It works in so many ways. In hobbies, arts, philosophies. Music is a kind of insanity. I know. I've got *mine* penned up in the music now, and I think I can keep it there now, and save my soul."

"*Yours?*"

"Yes, mine. I know now—now that it's safe for me to know. I was down at that village by the Beach a year or so ago. I'm a Kain, of course, one of the crazy Kains, after all. John Sanderson was born in the village and lived there till his death. Only once that folks could remember had he been away, and that was when he took some papers to the city for Mrs. Kain to sign. He was caretaker at the old 'Kain place' the last ten years of his life, and deaf, they said, since his tenth year—'deaf as a post.' And they told me something else. They said there was a story that before my father, Daniel, married her, my mother had been an actress. An actress! You'll understand that *I* needed no one to tell me *that!*

"One told me he had heard that she was a *great* actress. Dear God, if they could only know! When I think of that night and that setting, that scene! It killed her—and it got me over the wall——"

V

FOR WHERE IS YOUR FORTUNE NOW?

MANY is the time my mother has stood at that window in the dead of a stormy night, when the roof rattled over our heads, and the wet shone on the cobbles, and boats came ashore on the beach; by the hour she has stood there in her bare feet and her nightgown, so still and ghost-like you wouldn't know it till you touched her in the dark. I've touched her more than once. Other times I've heard the Portugee grumbling, half in his sleep, to know what was up, and I guessed she would be there again at the window, keeping an eye out for my father.

Since the first I can remember, she was always fearful my father would be turning up again. It haunted her. Maybe it was a dream or some kind of a sigh. She never had much learning, and she put faith in things she couldn't understand, like signs and cards and printed words.

I'm sure that was the reason she never got married to the Portugee. When my mother got a thing into her head, it was there to stay—she made a lot of it, and brooded over it, and sometimes, seeing she had no learning, it came out a queer thing in the end. It was so about getting married to the Portugee. Somebody

told her once there was a law against a woman's being married to two men at the same time, and that a woman could be taken away and locked up in jail for it. She never forgot that. The law was a thing she never saw head or tail to, and when she thought about it, it got to be a terrible thing, as terrible as a ghost or a dragon. She was more fearful of the law than she was of the church, for she could see the church, but she couldn't see the law. And even when the stone set up in the graveyard for all our men that went North in the *Magnolia* had been standing there as much as eight years—even then, she said, you never could tell. One might have got clear, she said, and that one might be my father.

The women down at the fish-flakes where she worked were always making game of her one way or another, because she would believe anything. Scarcely a day passed but one of them pretended she made out a strange sail opening the Head, like the *Magnolia* coming home again, and never once did my mother fail them. It lay on her mind, that's why. For a wink each time she stood there with her hands empty, and her eyes running everywhere over the water, and her heart in her throat.

"What would he do to me?" she was thinking.

She was a strong, big woman, my mother, with dark hair and red cheeks and slow blue eyes. I can see her standing there on the pier now, with her skirt tucked up over her rough, red stockings, and her sleeves cut

short below the shoulders, and her hair blowing about her head, the blue water beyond her, and the boats, and all around her the fish-flakes like steps of snow, and the other women cleaning fish with her, and the slop and gurry from the tubs making the planks shine like the sky above. She stood like that, I say, looking for the loom of a ship that lay long years in the bottom of the sea, and her heart was in her throat.

She was never mad when they laughed, but afterward she would look at her tub awhile, and shake her head and say, "I got a feeling here, girls"—and she would put her hand on her bosom—"I got a feeling here, girls, Ben Ring's never dead. That's all."

She made no secret of it. She wasn't the woman to make a secret of anything, nor was ours the village. She would say it no matter who was there, no matter even if the Portugee was there himself, and he often was, for he liked to watch folks work.

Sometimes he worked himself, though not often. Once he drove cart awhile for Haley, who put up travelers, and one summer he took it into his head to go to the weirs with John Briar's crew. That was hard on my mother and me. Though all the other weirmen went empty to the traps, my mother would get up at half past two to make the Portugee's breakfast, and with the two of them bundling about the kitchen where I slept, my sleep was broken, too. I used to lie there no more than half awake and watch them and their big shadows, my mother in her nightgown and wrapper

fussing over the stove, with an eye peeping sideways as if she wondered if he wouldn't ever be tiring of it, and the Portugee getting his head through his shirt and hauling on his boots, one after the other, every motion slow and important, as if a great deal depended on it. And sometimes I used to wonder, lying there, what my father looked like, how my father used to pull on his boots, and get his head through his shirt, and wipe his mouth after he had drunk his coffee, and whether his footsteps sounded like the Portugee's going off down the cobbles toward the beach, smaller and smaller till they died away, and my mother yawned and sat down on the foot of my bed and began to think about dressing.

It made a change in the Portugee, too, having money coming in each week. Very often after supper he was out at Haley's, and sometimes he came home the worse for it. Once he hit my mother, though I don't think it hurt her much. She thought everything he did was right, just as she used to think everything my father did was right. All the same she brightened up and things were better every way when the weather came on cooler with fall and the Portugee tired of going to the weirs.

He was a good man in lots of ways, the Portugee. Very often he went clamming with me, and lay on the turf-bank at the edge of the marsh, watching the clouds sail by, while I filled my bucket. When I came home from playing I could almost always count

on finding him waiting somewhere in the lane, sitting on some one's doorstep with his hands behind his head and his round, black beard in the air. And then he would walk home slowly with me, and if my mother wasn't there yet he would do what he could toward getting supper ready, peeling potatoes or something. He never talked much unless it was about work, but he loved to talk about work.

He seemed to take pleasure in tales of great pieces of work men had done, like the man who stood the wheel fifty hours in a gale of wind and had to have his hands cut off, and the like of that. Yet he always seemed a little sickly to me, and his eyes weren't strong.

And how faithful my mother was! She was the kind that's meant to be faithful, though, and not to live alone. And perhaps she was more right than wrong to put faith in dreams and signs.

Everything in the Bible goes to prove it's the simple and the faithful that see God, and I've no doubt they see other things as well—angels and devils and fairies and the meaning of omens.

It's certain my mother had an omen of some kind, and if she read it just the opposite, it makes no difference. For it was on the very day my father came back that my mother had the first sure feeling he was dead and gone forever.

The night before there was a big gale of wind and rain, the kind you'll remember a long while if you live by the sea. That night we heard trees and chimneys

coming down and the surf was thunder, for when the wind lies in the northeast the seas come clear of the Head mountain-high, and the beaches are one long lather of white. My mother was on foot all night, it seemed.

Around midnight a pane blew out in the front room, filling the place with wind and wet, but she would go back there for all of it. She was so restless. I don't know how many times I opened my eyes and saw her face by the light in the hall, like a dream.

It must have been about two when she gave a big groan. It was an unnatural sound. I jumped up in a wink, but then I was fearful of going in and sat still till the Portugee came leading her out to the kitchen. She sat beside me wringing her hands.

"The sea's heaving up the dead," said she. She looked daft, with her eyes set and her hair all down around her.

The Portugee couldn't make head or tail of it, and kept asking if there wasn't something he could do or somebody he could get.

My mother didn't seem to hear him at all.

"What'll he do?" she kept on saying, wringing her hands and staring at the stovepipe. "Whatever will Ben Ring do to me?"

The Portugee put on his shirt and boots by and by, and said he was going out to get some woman, but in the end he didn't get far.

The tide began to go a little before daylight, and

that broke the wind. All of a sudden, just at sunrise, my mother began to laugh.

"I been so foolish," she laughed, "so foolish, so foolish!"

She laughed so hard and so long and her face got so red, that I don't know what would have come of it had she not turned to crying in the end. She lay on my bed and cried for ten minutes, I should say, as if her heart was broken. And then she got up and got breakfast.

You'd never have thought she had been up all night to see her at breakfast time. Everybody was out in the lane having a look at the wreckage, and a neighbor-woman came running in to talk it over, leaving the door open behind her and letting the sun in all over the floor, and the warm air of spring. She brought up short, seeing my mother.

"Why—why, Annie ——" she said. "Why, Annie, you look like a girl!"

She forgot all she was going to say, wanting to know what was up with my mother.

"It's all right," said my mother. "I been so foolish all these years, so foolish. But now I've seen him dead with his mates in the bottom of the sea. I've seen him sure as the sun in the sky."

"Where?" said Mrs. Hendie, sitting down and full of surprise.

"In here I've seen him." And my mother laid her hands on her bosom.

She didn't go to work that morning, seeing the gale

had put things out of sorts at the pier. All morning she went around the house half daft, it seemed, picking things up and laying them down again without knowing why. If any one spoke to her she went red and white and said: "What?" and by her eyes you'd say she didn't know yet whether to laugh or cry. Toward noon she grew quieter. For as much as a quarter of an hour she stood in the kitchen, brooding at the Portugee's boots behind the rocker in the corner, and all the while the color coming and going and a queer look around her lips.

"I guess," said she by and by, "I guess I'd like to get married."

The Portugee was lying on my bed; seeing her so still, and his mind relieved by it, he was almost off to sleep when she spoke up. It surprised him. He didn't know what in the world to do. He began to wander all around the house, coming back now and then on the chance she had got over it. She was beyond him.

"What would I wear?" he wanted to know.

He didn't seem to have anything to hang to. After he'd wandered about a bit more he said he thought she ought to talk it over with somebody.

"No, no," said she. "I wouldn't want to."

I can't say whether she thought better of it, but late that day she put on her shawl and started to go out. She got only as far as the front door, though, and in place of going out we heard her turning the

key and throwing the bolt to. She came back and stood still in the doorway, with all the color gone out of her cheeks.

"He's standing out there in the lane," said she.

We couldn't make her out at all.

"Looking at the house," said she.

"Who?" said the Portugee.

"Him," said my mother. "Ben Ring in the flesh."

"What you saying?" cried the Portugee, starting up. But then he gave a sigh. She had got beyond him with her moods and visions.

"I saw him there in the lane," said she again.

"That's foolish," said the Portugee. But all the same he was taken aback more than a little to see her so deathly white and shivering from head to foot, and so was I. We went into the front room; both of us, and peeped out of the window. The sun was getting low by that, and the lane right away down to the water was red with it, and empty.

The Portugee looked down at me and I looked up at him and he shook his head with a despairing air.

"She's awful queer," said he. He told my mother she had better lie down awhile when we came back, but she would have none of it.

"I saw him there in the lane," said she, "as plain as I see you and Benjie now." She stood with her eyes fixed hard on us and her head nodding slowly. "He had on a gray suit and a brown felt hat, and in his left hand he had a bag and in his right hand he

had a stick. He stood there abreast of June Sukie's step, looking up at the house here.

"And he knows," said she. "He knows. Else he would have come in, same as it would have been natural for a man to do."

It was well after dark before we had our supper, my mother was so distracted. And, seeing I had been up the night before, I was in bed and fast asleep before even the dishes were cleared away.

When I woke up it was the red of dawn. My mother was sitting on the foot of my bed, and on the floor with his legs sprawled out and a blanket thrown over them lay a man, sleeping like the dead. He was a large man, handsome in face, with hair turning grizzled above the ears, and when I saw the brown hat crumpled up beside him and the gray suit he had on I remembered my mother's words the night before, and the fear of him struck to my heart.

"That's my father?" said I in a whisper.

My mother turned to me with a queer, odd stare.

"Yes," said she. "He come in around two."

"What'll we do?" I asked, lying still for fear of him.

"I don't know," said she. "I don't know whatever."

"Why's he laying there? What's the matter of him?"

"He was to Haley's most all the night, drinking ale. He come in here on his hands and knees, and

that's how he come, Benjie, and he went off straight to sleep like that."

She leaned down to smooth out the quilt a little and pull it over his feet, and I wondered to see her so gentle.

"When he wakes up," I wanted to know, "will he carry on?"

All the answer she gave me was to sit with her cheeks between her hands brooding at the floor. The sun was up now; it came in white at the window and it seemed queerer than ever to see my strange father sleeping there like the dead. I pinched my mother's sleeve.

"Let's run away," said I. Then I had another thought.

"Where's *he* gone to?" said I, thinking of the Portugee.

"He'll be halfway to Squoisett by now," said my mother. "We thought it best he should go somewheres else, and so he took his things and a dollar I gave him, and he was out on the highroad by three, and that's the last of him. We thought it best on account of your father."

And she had no more than got the words out of her mouth when the door opened and there came the Portugee himself, shuffling in with a bundle over his back and his eyes on his boots.

My mother rose up on her feet, and I never heard her so sharp.

"What you doing here?" she wanted to know.

He let the bundle down on the floor and shifted from one foot to the other and hung his head.

"Where would I go to?" said he. He never looked at my mother.

"If only you'd tell me where I'd go to," said he.

He sat down in the rocker and my mother sat down on the bed and everything seemed hopeless enough.

"Well," said my mother by and by, "seeing you're here, you'd best lend me a hand and we'll fetch him in on to the bed, for the floor's no place to be sleeping."

And they did that, the Portugee taking his shoulders and my mother at his feet, and they laid him on the bed in the other room.

My mother took me along when she went to work that morning, for we were both fearful of what my father would do when he woke up. Everybody at the pier knew all about it, of course, my father having been at Haley's the night before, and they were asking my mother a hundred questions.

"I don't know," she had to answer. "I don't know, and I don't know."

Her hand was tight on mine when we came up the lane for dinner that noon and mine was tight on hers. The two of us wondering hard enough whether he had come back to his senses yet. And when we got to the door we found my father up in his stocking feet, playing pitch with the Portugee.

"I've twenty-eight for game, and be damned if you

can beat it!" he was crying, with a huge bang of his fist on the table. And when my mother heard that, the strength went out of her hand, and she stood there leaning all her weight on the side of the door, for it was never the voice of a man who came with harm in his mind.

He was a big man, as I've said, and a handsome man. He sat there for a minute, taking her in from head to foot and never saying a word, and then he gave the table another bang with his fist, crying:

"By the good God, Annie, girl, what a fool a man is!"

He pushed back his chair with a clatter, and striding across the floor he took hold of my mother's shoulders and held her off from him. He had a way with women, my father did.

"And what a block of wood I've got on my shoulders after all!" he cried. "Or else I'd have been here in my own house these eight years past, and be damned to all the slim waists and bad luck in the world!"

You should have seen my mother then. For what with this sudden turn to all her frights, and what, too, with the look of my father's admiring eyes, the red was chasing the white over her face and tears were raining down and her knees were gone. It was beyond belief, beyond belief. She had never looked to see him reasonable, and that was why.

"I've done you a great wrong," my father went on,

drawing off and looking at her mournfully. "You'll never forgive me, Annie, never."

That was all. Not a word of her and the Portugee, and the Portugee sitting right there in the flesh all the while and hoping everything would come out right.

"That's Benjie, is it?" said my father, and crooked a finger to me.

"Benjie," said he, laying a hand on my hand, "Benjie, I've done you both a great wrong. I've give up my rights to everything a man would want, and I can never look to have you forgive me, and that's my deserts, that's my deserts."

He blew his nose, and I saw tears in his eyes.

All the rest of the day that mood was on him, and though he ate a great deal of fried whiting at dinner, and made himself comfortable, and played endless games of pitch with the Portugee, yet he would never be presuming, never a hint of reproach crossed his lips.

He gave us no word of how he had come to get clear of the *Magnolia* when she went down, but then, the news was old with him and he'd had to answer so many questions at Haley's the night before that I suppose he was tired of it. That isn't to say he didn't talk. He talked the better part of the time, but mainly in scraps, jumping here and there—how he had missed one fortune by a hair at such a time, or been done out of another at another time. Bad luck had followed his footsteps no matter where he chose to go. He had done more than a few big pieces of

work out in the world, but others had got the name for them; every time, it seemed, there was somebody or other ready to step in at the last minute and get a name and a pot of money, and bad luck sat on my father's shoulders. Though that wasn't to say it always would.

The Portugee never got enough of listening to him, nor I, for they were all strange tales to me. To hear my father talk, you would think our village was nothing; he was all for the huge, high cities, and the big rivers, and plains a hundred miles across.

"A man's got a chance there!" he cried, pounding the table. "Down here," said he, "when a man turns out of a morning, he knows pretty well what he'll turn in at night, ain't that so? But out there a man can never tell. Turn out a pauper and, like as not, turn in a millionaire. That's right! I've known 'em to!

"Not to say that's everything," he went on after a minute in a soberer voice, shaking his head. "Millions ain't everything. No—no."

And after supper, when everybody fell silent for some reason, and uncomfortable, and did nothing but stare at the lamp on the table, he said the same thing again, "Millions ain't everything. No—no."

He looked at my mother sidewise and then at the Portugee and bit his lips.

"I've done a great wrong," said he with a sigh. "It's my just deserts." He felt around in the dark under the table till he found his shoes.

"Well," said he, his face all red from stooping, "It's getting late, I guess." He put on his hat and took it off and coughed once or twice. Then, seeing my mother still staring at the lamp like a dumb one and her fingers picking at the edge of the plate, he said, "Well, I guess I'll be turning in." And with that he went out and down the lane to Haley's, to put up for the night.

The Portugee took to wandering about the room, out of ease as any one could see, scratching himself and coughing and rubbing his wrist across his mouth, thinking of the good ale down at Haley's and my father so good-natured all that day and ready to stand him a glass, no doubt. In the end he couldn't bear it, and saying he guessed he'd have a look around, he put on his hat and went off down the lane, too.

Through it all, from first to last, not a word did my mother say; not a look did she give a one of us. But after she had washed up the supper things and got the kindling in from the wood-house she sat on the foot of my bed with her hands clenched on her knees and a red spot standing on the white of her cheek and her eyes half-closed, staring at nothing whatever.

How long she sat there I can't say, for I was off to sleep in a minute, and it was only the sound of her crying woke me up again. It seemed like a dream to see her lying there on my bed with her hands in her eyes and her shoulders working up and down, the

lamp burning low and all the house so still I could hear the beach awash and the breeze blowing in the trees.

"What's the matter of you?" I wanted to know, but she wouldn't take her hands away to look at me, and said, "Be still, Benjie!"

"What you crying about?" said I, for I couldn't be still.

"I don't know—I don't know!"

"Is it my father or something?" said I. And with that another notion came into my head. "And if he's my father," said I, "then why doesn't he come to live to home, same as other folks' fathers?"

"Be still and go to sleep, Benjie," said she, and I saw the red creeping up between the fingers on her cheeks. "Go to sleep," said she.

I suppose the thought came to her then that she'd best be doing the same herself, for after a minute she got up and started off across the kitchen, fumbling at her buttons. But she had got no more than half the way when she brought up of a sudden and stood there listening.

There were footsteps in the yard, and we heard my father going on to the Portugee.

"Who are you?" he wanted to know. "Who are you, anyway?" He sounded good-natured enough now, as if Haley's ale lay well on his stomach.

"If I've changed my mind," said he, "what business

is it of yours? Who the devil are you, to be coming between man and wife?"

"You're a good fellow, all right!" said he, and we heard him give the Portugee a good round slap on the back that made him cough and scatter pebbles with his boots. And after another minute we heard the hinges squeaking out on the wood-house where the Portugee went in, and my father's voice from the kitchen step, "That's the man, now. I've slept in worse places myself, and plenty's the time."

All the while my mother stood there with her hands on her bosom and her lips half open to her breath. When my father opened the door and saw her there so still in front of him, he seemed taken aback, and for a minute it was touch-and-go whether he would come in or not.

"Oh!" said he, kind of laughing and out of ease. "You were sitting up?"

He stepped in and closed the door, pulling it to several times before it seemed to latch, and all the while his face was red as a beet and his eyes everywhere.

"Hello, Annie!" said he. He cleared his throat, and then he smacked his hands together, making a great fuss, and seeing my mother hadn't stirred yet, nor so much as made a sound, he began patting her shoulders with both hands. "My, my!" said he. "What a handsome girl! What a handsome, dear girl, Annie!"

And the next thing I knew, there was my mother laughing and crying at once, and her arms around my father's neck.

You should have seen her the next day. She was so happy and her eyes were so bright. All the time you'd say she was just getting ready to sing a song, or her feet to fall into a dance. Yet there was a shyness about her, and a way of turning red at nothing whatever. And what a fine day it was for it all, with the sun shining bright, and the sea as blue as blue, and the willows breaking out in a feather of leaves, and a wind blowing.

My father went with my mother to her work, for he couldn't leave her a minute. He sat there all the morning on a salt-cask with a pipe between his teeth, telling tales to the Portugee, and it's hard to say whether it was at him or at my mother folks looked the more.

That was splendid that morning, but my father wasn't the man to put up with it long. He didn't think it right my mother should go out to work. He was ready to do anything, any sort of work a man could turn an honest hand to, and he wanted the Portugee to stand on his own feet, what was more, and earn his own salt. The two of them went around the village next day, and my father talked with a great many men, only a few words with some, while with others he went on at a great rate in his loud, good-

natured way. But with all of them it came to the same. He just couldn't help laughing at them.

"What you think I am?" he kept asking them, and one of them said:

"What you want is the earth, Ben, with a gold fence around it."

At dinner he was still laughing and carrying on at the lot of them.

"My, my! Old Harriott, and his 'dollar a day'—imagine! Ha, ha, ha! That makes me laugh. And I've seen the day when I've put up my nose at—well, I won't say. My, my!"

My mother watched him with a cloud in her eyes.

"By God!" he cried, banging the table. "What chance has a man got in a hole like this?" He waved his hand behind him. "Out there—" said he, looking at my mother "—out there where I come from it's another thing!"

My mother's eyes went down to her plate again, and all the recent brightness was gone from her face.

"Oh well, I'll have another try around," said my father, but if my mother didn't shake her head she might have, for she knew as well as any one that my father was wasting himself in a village the size of ours.

You wouldn't say any more that she was going to sing a song. All afternoon and evening she kept quiet, and when my father was shifting about from window to window and staring out at the sky for minutes at a time, my mother was looking the other way.

I can't say what time it was that night when I woke up to see her on her knees by the bed, watching me with the saddest look on her face.

"What is it?" said I in a whisper, for it was all queer in the weak light from the moon.

"Nothing," said she.

"What you crying about?" said I.

"I don't know," said she. "I don't know."

But she kept on looking at me as if her heart had been broken, and her eyes wouldn't let me go.

By and by, after we had been quiet awhile, she said:

"Oh, Benjie, I want you should be a fine, great man when you come to it; it's not right you shouldn't have the chance. But what chance has any one got in a hole like this? It's not the same as it is out there, Benjie—not here it ain't—and I know it well."

I wondered to hear her go on so, and to see the round tears dropping out of her eyes.

"What's the matter of you?" said I.

"Your father wouldn't be staying here a great while," said she. "And you'd best go along with him when he comes to go," said she, "and make yourself a fortune out there in the world, Benjie, boy." And before I could catch her nightgown even, she was off running in the dark.

In the morning it seemed my mother had been foolish enough, for the first thing my father did was to put on his hat and coat.

"Let's have another try," said he to the Portugee, "and see what side of their mouths they sing today." And then, seeing Haley coming into the yard, he gave a laugh. "Well, here's one of them already."

Haley was a smallish man with glassy eyes, always going about in his apron and talking short with every one.

"I come to see about that little bill," said he, when the door was opened, and he stood with his fists on his hips looking at my father.

"Little bill?" said my father.

Haley had it in his hand, figured on a bit of paper.

"Yes," said he, "little bill! There's one night's lodging, with supper, for one thing, and there's seventeen glasses of ale first and last I've carried on the board, and three half-plugs of Hayo's, the same, figuring two-thirty-five, all told."

"*Two-thirty-five!*" My father put his head back and roared with laughter. "Haley, on my word you'd think 'twas two hundred and thirty-five dollars, the way you act. *Two-thirty-five!* Dear, dear!"

Haley kept standing as he was, with a sour look on his face.

"That's all right," said he. "It's easy enough to say 'Two-thirty-five!' It's easy enough to say 'Remember it, will you?' It's easy enough to say 'Chalk that up, that's the boy!' "

"Look here!" cried my father, growing purple and shaking a finger in Haley's face. "By God, Haley,

you'd best take care. Whenever have I robbed a man or woman? Say! Stand there and tell me the date when Ben Ring's word wasn't good for whatever he asked of any man. Sing out!"

In place of answering, Haley closed his lips tighter and looked beyond him where my mother stood by the table, her face red and her eyes down.

"Come Saturday I'll 'tend to it," said she, hardly over a whisper.

"That's enough," said Haley. He bowed double over his apron. "That's all I want to know, all I want to know. Good day to you, ma'am."

I never saw a man so mad as my father was. It was just as well Haley was quick into his cart and quiet about it, for my father stood at the gate like a wild one, his face the color of meat, cursing him by every oath I ever heard.

"And as for you!" he cried at my mother, who was out behind him. "And as for *you!* ——" He stopped and pinched his forehead hard between his thumb and forefinger, to get the better of himself.

"It's no use, Annie," he went on in a kindlier voice. "You can see for yourself, Annie. Them and their ways are beyond me, beyond me, and I guess I'm beyond them, too. It's no use, Annie, girl."

And with that, giving her a kiss, he was out in the lane before my mother could say "Jack Robinson."

My heart went down and down. I began tugging at my mother's hand.

"Ma!" said I. "Oh, ma—*you* know!"

That seemed to bring her wits back; we were out of the gate in a wink and my mother calling: "Ben! Ben!"

"Ben," said she, when we came up with him. "Take Benjie."

My father was dumbfounded.

"Take *Benjie?*" He began to laugh and shake his head. "What on earth would I do with *Benjie*, say?" Then he turned soberer, "There, there," said he. "It's ten chances to one I'll be back again before you know it, bringing a pot of money for you both. There, there!"

"Take Benjie," said my mother in the same tone.

It took my father aback to see her standing up to him. Her hand was so tight on mine it hurt, but she wasn't fearful of him nor of anybody now, and her face was like a doll's face or a dead person's, so calm it was.

"Take Benjie!" said she, and that was all she said.

I could see my father didn't know how to take her, nor what to do, and with that my heart was going up again.

"Ma," I whispered. "How about my clothes and everything?"

But she gave my hand a fierce grip.

"S-s-s-h! They don't amount, they don't amount. Go! Hurry now. Go! Go!" said she, seeing my

father moving off, half of one mind and half of another.

She never kissed me; never so much as a "God bless you!" did she have to give me; you'd think she had no feeling in her. All the while my father and I were climbing the hill to the high road she stood there in the same spot watching us, quiet as a stone, her face like a doll's with the pink washed out, or a dead person's.

It was a fine day, that day I started out to make my fortune in the world. The high road runs along the ridge there with all the world spread out below, and that morning a big soft wind was blowing across it, the sky was full of little puffs of white cloud, like the ships we saw sailing far out to sea, and along the road the bushes were in bloom.

My father was like another man. At first he paid me no heed, but walked on straight and stiff. After that he seemed put out to find me still tagging at his heels, and I was of two minds about turning back. But in the end he couldn't help it; he started whistling and swinging his arms with the tune, and then he gave me a good slap on the back and said that he and I would show them what was what.

We walked on so all morning. Toward noon we stopped in a lonely part and he had me take off one of my shoes and put a pebble in it.

"That's all right," said he, when I complained how it hurt to be walking so, and he clapped his hands and

cried "Fine! Fine!" to see me limping and groaning. And we had no more than come around the next bend when there was a farmhouse by the road and a kindly, white-faced woman who gave us a good dinner and made all manner of me, calling me a lamb and a poor baby and the like. When we came to go, after she had kissed me, she gave my hand a shake, and I found a shiny half-dollar left in my fingers. I gave it to my father, once we were on the high road again, for my pockets were full of holes, and then he took the pebble out of my shoe, laughing merrily all the while and thinking more and more that I was a fine fellow.

So we walked on, and when my father wasn't whistling or singing a song, he was telling me tales of the great cities and of what he was going to do and how we were going to show them what was what. It made me feel good to see him so big and handsome and able, and to know he was my father and I was his son. It made him feel good too, for he told me as much. Once he grew sober. We were having a rest, stretched out in the grass above the road where a hill ran down into a valley full of farms, and the sea at the other end like a blue teacup. We lay there awhile watching the clouds, and then my father began in a solemn way.

"You ought to do well, Benjie," said he. "You keep right at it and tend to your knitting and you ought to have a name and a pot of money one day—when I'm dead maybe, and you're a man."

He told me he was unlucky. He lay on his back

staring at the sky and running on like a man talking more to himself. He said he was born to be unlucky, and that was all there was to it. The world was full of chances, he said, for a man that was lucky and had his eye out all the while and kept clear of women.

"Take a man's word on it," said he, "and keep clear of the unlucky animals. Never let yourself get tied up with a woman, Benjie; not with any woman, good or bad, good or bad."

By the time we came to Squoisett, where the railroad is, I was tired to death and my feet so sore there was no need of pebbles to make me limp. There wasn't any farmhouse there either, nor any kind woman to give us a meal, but we had that money now and we walked into a lunch-room, bold as you please, and ordered coffee and doughnuts of the girl.

My father's spirits had come back again. We were the only ones in the lunch-room, and there wasn't a minute when he wasn't laughing or talking with the girl, even when she seemed sharp with him, or made a face, or turned her back and paid him no heed.

He took a great while to finish his doughnuts, and then he ordered some more and when the girl set the plate down he got hold of her hand.

"Fresh!" said she. She jerked it back and tried to give him a slap, but he only roared with laughter, and after she had made a face at him she began laughing too and patted her red hair up and asked him which way he was bound.

"Oh," said he, "just out for a walk."

"Oh, you like to walk?" said she.

"Do you?" said my father. His eyes were bright as water and a smile was on his face. As for me, I might as well have been in Tophet for all the heed they paid to me.

"I'm through already," I whispered to my father, wishing he would come now. But all he did was put his elbows on the table and look at the girl.

"Do *you?*" said he, again.

"Oh, it's all according," said she, looking at her finger nails.

"All according to what?" said he.

"Oh—to the weather," said she, with a toss of her head.

"It's elegant weather," said my father. "And what a nice road out there beyond the freight-yard, don't you think? What?"

"Fresh!" said she. She wouldn't answer anything but "Fresh!" or "Smart Aleck!" after that until we went. But all the same my father was in the highest spirits, humming a dance-tune under his breath, while we walked off through the little street. There was scarcely any one about, for the sun was going down and people were at their suppers, and everything quiet and peaceful in the glowing light. Just beyond the last houses some freight-cars stood on a siding, red as blood.

"Here's where we get our train," said my father.

"Our private car," said he, with a laugh and a thumb over his shoulder at one of the box-cars that stood with its door open, looking black enough inside. And after that he fell silent.

It came on cooler with the sundown, and there was a feel of rain in the air. Everything was so still. The sky turned from red to yellow and then to green, darker and darker all the while till the stars came out, very faint for the mist in the air. Across the road lay a broad field with a wire fence around it and woods beyond; you could almost see the dark coming out of the woods and creeping in across the field.

I tried to think of something to say. I wished my father would talk and carry on the way he had that afternoon, and give me a good slap on the back. Everything was so still here; there wasn't any surf here, and the only light was a red light burning down the track a way.

After a while I saw somebody coming out along the road under the embankment, and I didn't want my father to see, for I knew as certain as anything it was that girl from the lunch-room.

"Pa," said I, taking hold of his hand, "let's talk about what you and I are going to do."

"Sure," said he. "Sure we'll talk about it. By and by we will."

He dropped my hand and got up on his feet.

"You sit here quiet and I'll be back in a few min-

utes," said he. "It's all right, all right; no harm will come to you here."

And with that he was stepping down into the road and coughing a little against his sleeve.

"Whither goest thee?" I heard him saying in a comical kind of a voice.

"Oh, I don'test know," said the girl. And then they both laughed and started walking off along the road side by side, growing smaller and smaller, and dimmer, and dimmer, till the trees came around them and I couldn't hear them any more.

Oh, but how I hated my father! And how lonely I was, and fearful, sitting there all by myself in that strange land with the empty field in front, and the empty box-cars behind, and that one red light looking at me like an eye from down the track. And how I cried, with my face in the grass, and my backbone running chills, and my heart full of bitterness and the awful longing to be home. I wanted to be home.

By and by I got up and started home. I ran at first. I ran through the town of Squoisett, with people staring at me from their door steps and calling after me, some of them, and I kept on running along the highroad till my breath gave out and I had to walk. I had been tired to death; now I wasn't tired any longer, nor lame, nor anything.

How I kept to the road I can't for the life of me say. What with the darkness and a passing shower of rain and all, I might have come out on a dozen by-

roads and been no wiser. The moon rose late, and then it was better, even if I could see how long the blue road lay before me. I began to be tired again, my legs ached, and the soles of my feet were raw. And once I grew ashamed, and wondered what my mother would say to me, coming home so soon with never a fortune to my name.

But then I didn't care. A wind came up a valley from over the sea, carrying the smell of salt and wood, a wind with a glitter of pearl in it, and there I was on my toes again and pounding along with all my might. For I was coming near now, coming near, and I could see the hills before me rolling down and rolling down to the shores I knew.

The moon stood high and pale, and the gray of dawn was coming up the east. The wind blew stronger; I never knew so sweet a wind, full of the ocean and flowers. And when I came along the ridge over our village, where the highroad branches to go winding down and a big dark rock stands in the elbow of it, whom should I see but my mother sitting there in the gray with her back to the wind and her hair blowing.

I never would have looked to see her there at such an hour; for a minute I was fearful something had happened to her.

"Whatever you doing here?" I cried, and that was the first she knew I was there.

She sat there looking at me.

"Whatever is it?" said I, going closer to her.

"I don't know," said she. "I don't know."

But, then all of a sudden, she began to cry as if her heart had been broken, and the next thing she had picked me up in her strong arms, crying: "You shouldn't have come back, Benjie, you shouldn't, you shouldn't," and there we were going down the hill with the pebbles spattering away in front and the sun up red on the roofs and the Portugee sitting at the bottom of the hill, waiting, with his hands behind his head and his round black beard in the air.

"You shouldn't have come back," my mother kept whispering over and over all the while. "Oh, Benjie, Benjie, you shouldn't have come back to me," and her tears fell wet on my face. But yet her eyes were shining with the light of heaven, and it was more like a song she sang in the morning wind.

"You shouldn't have come back to me, Benjie, never, never; for where is your fortune now?"

VI

THE MAD

ANDREW sat in a nest of beach-plums on a dune watching the dusk come over the sea. He had been there a long while, simply because for once he could think of nothing else to do. An hour ago, before sunset, three children had come past from the bogs with cranberry-pails, laughing and spraying the sand with their boots, but at sight of Andrew's head thrust out from the covey on its red wryneck their laughter had ceased, and they had taken to their heels for the backside road a quarter of a mile upshore. That was because they had been frightened about Andrew.

The mothers of the village misunderstood Andrew and the way he looked at children. The real reason he watched them so was because he, of all grown-ups, truly loved them, and because he wanted above all things to run and play with them, to match his wrist with theirs in top-spinning, and his wits and legs against theirs in twilight games of run-sheep-run. But he knew from experience that when he did it men bellowed at him and women ran about like chickens with their heads off, snatching up children this way and that. So he didn't try it any more. He just watched them when they went by, gripping his fists hard to

hush the adventurous booming of his heart, and though this cost him a very great effort no one ever gave him credit for it.

Or if sometimes red things flickered through his brain, thoughts violent or obscene, they were no more than the thoughts that may and do happen on occasion to all men; and Andrew was better than they in this; these thoughts frightened him. They filled him with so shuddering a panic that he would run sometimes for miles and miles across the moors to get away from them. And neither did any one give him credit for that.

The thing he loved next to children was fire. It gave him a strange numbing ecstasy to sit and watch the sun going down into the ocean. At the moment when it lay hemispherical and lurid on the edge of the globe the splendor inside of him was almost more than he could bear. It ran up the middle of his bones and licked the back of his skull. It was not only the sun, it was the whole watery world in conflagration; every wave so far as he could see was a flame-blown crimson under the wind that came ashore, and the surf on the beach beneath him was smoke, rose and carnation and all colors that are sweet. Andrew got up and danced along the beach-plum stems.

But now the fire had gone out. The sun had vanished and a drift of ashes covered the sea. The sky was slate. This death of things sumptuous and ardent filled Andrew with a melancholy as piercing as his

ecstasy had been. It ran clammy in the hollows of his bones. He buttoned his reefer and wrapped his long, weedy arms around his body; but the wind knew no barriers. He wanted to go back to the village where the lamps would be glowing, but the aspect of the ocean held him with a strange fascination, like the smooth, distended skin of a drowned man.

It looked oily. He thought to himself how splendid it would be if it *were* oil, all millions of waves of oil running to the horizon. Then he could light it at the edge with a match and the flame would roll up to the floor of heaven. It was Andrew that had set Grafton's hay-barn afire two years before, because he wanted to hear the whistles blowing on the fish-freezers and see the men running with the brassy gear and watch the tower of light and feel the heat. He had been scared afterward. For days he had wrestled with the terrors of ten hells to hold his babbling tongue. Mercifully, at the point of moral exhaustion, when he was on the very eve of telling, he had forgotten the whole thing. So it remained a secret; the only one Andrew had ever kept.

The wind grew darker and darker. Ricocheting from the beach, it rocked the stems about him with a furious whine of tiny leaves; it penetrated and smote his heart. Why did he stay here in the cold and lonely night? Little by little a horror laid hold of him. It was something formless like the wind and dark like the sea, and in it there ran a thread of greed and joy,

as in the mind of one sitting breathless before the curtain of a tragic stage.

Andrew forgot the cold. He unwrapped his arms and sat up so straight that his spine snapped like the crackling stems. His attention became concentrated and avid. Revolving his head on its twisted neck, he swept with his gaze the iron plain of the sea.

The broad shadow was broken by a light. The dark had one star. It obtruded from behind the headland to the east and stood boldly across the night, like a burning ship.

It grew. It was not going away, not even passing by; it was advancing toward Andrew, blown shoreward in the wind, and it was like a steamer burning at sea.

He began to see the flames now, like swords and serpents and pinnacles. Sitting cross-legged in his lofty, dark, and lonely seat, he watched the pillar of fire that had come to stand over the outer bars. God, Who knows the hearts of the humble, had made Andrew a miracle. In his lap his palms turned toward it, and even so far they seemed to taste the good warmth; all the little nerve-knots in his body heard the roaring of the flame that seemed to call him across the distance and wrap him about and carry his soul up shouting to the blinding throne of God.

Andrew was at peace. He remained unconscious of the passage of time and of other external things, such as the hallooing of runners, the grunt and sand-

wash of bodies plunging down the break of the dunes to the beach, the scream of a hurt horse, even the report of a gun. Not until the seaward fire began to lose a little of its brightness did his attention leave it, and then his heart leaped newly, for he saw all the beach below him like a garden of red and yellow blooms. Close in the glow of the driftwood fires they had built there he saw the breakers come and go away like white jumping-ropes; he caught the sheen of a surf-boat's side in the twinkling instant of its slewing aground, and he saw all the broad wet causeway of the sand thick with a litter of life, like night-crowds at a carnival, minute and vivid.

But here were no merrymakers. The truth took hold of Andrew and shook him till his teeth knocked together. His delight in the burning ship was forgotten, and in its place surged another of his life's deep preoccupations, the hunger and thirst to help.

He got out of the covey and slid down the dune and came upon the beach. His ears were full of a hundred voices of panic, the glow of a dozen fires was in his eyes, and when he ran on the sand a dozen shadows of himself swung like a wheel around his feet. He ran this way and he ran that. In his eagerness he leaped in great strides.

He saw a man with a life-belt around his neck struggling to drag a box out of the surf.

"Here—here!" he cried, "le'me lend you a hand with that!"

He started to tug at a corner with all his might, but the man looked at him with unfriendly eyes and he had to desist. So he ran on again across the fire-spots, leaping and snapping his fingers.

He came on the *High Head* coastguard crew trying to beach their boat in the smother of surf, and there again he would have thrown in his strength had not one of them tripped on him and gone down flat in the sand and spume. It was Captain Small himself. "Git the hell out o' here!" he bawled at Andrew, giving him another curse and a kick.

Andrew ran one way of the beach till he came to the end of the fires, and then he turned and ran back to the other end with all his shadows wheeling about him like rays in the halo of God. "Does anybody want help?" he cried at intervals in a loud voice. Faces flickered into his vision and swam out again. Some were quiet and blank, some blinked and frowned, some smiled foolishly with brittle lines around the mouth; out of one of these mouths there ran a trickle of blood. Upon each one in turn, for the fragment of a second, his attention fastened itself with an extraordinary force, and to each he flung his resolute question, "D'you need help?" But with each it was the same; if he were sitting by a fire and staring at nothing he continued to sit so and stare, and if he wandered through the red twilight and whimpered he kept on wandering and whimpering; and Andrew had to leave him, for in an hour such as this the time of

the man that helps can not be wasted with indecision. So he ran forward, pounding through the streaks of flame and shadow, driven mightily by the thunder of the surf-lines and the shoutings of his heart, flinging his arms for attention to his cry, "Anybody here need help?"

Once he saw a woman with a blanket over her head trying to herd five small children along the beach. She was a fat woman with a plum-colored face and china-blue eyes, and on her face and in her eyes was a look of the drollest stupefaction, as if she had been the baby of them all. She had a child on an arm and another on her back, leaving but one hand for the other three, and of course they lagged and gaped at the fires and stumbled and got up again and started toddling the wrong way.

Andrew pounced upon them.

"Here—here! le'me lend you a hand with them young'ns!"

Two of them he whirled up in his two arms. He felt gigantic. "Now, Missus, where to?" He tossed his charges gaily. He made a commotion in the sand with his feet like the prancing of a steed. "What's that?" he shouted in the woman's face, for he could make no tail or beginning of the words that commenced to rush out of her mouth. She was a Pole.

"Speak slow!" He frowned to steady her. But her outlandish gabble only poured the faster, while

the china-blue eyes fixed themselves over his shoulder in wilder despair.

He turned around to look, and then he understood. Between the two of them they had managed to gather up the four oldest of the children. It was the last and least that had been left adrift. It was coming in the right direction, to be sure, with a tremendous wabbling of fat knees, but the red shawl that had covered its nakedness had fallen by the wayside some yards past; its tummy was cold and it wept.

Andrew's response was instantaneous. Dropping the two he held, he charged upon the young one and gathered it to shelter from the disastrous night. Then his eyes fell on the shawl, cast like a stain on the sand beyond. "You wait a second, young'n!" he blared in the infant's ear, and, heaping it on the ground, he made another charge. He retrieved and made a bundle of the shawl and was on the point of returning for the baby when his attention was distracted by the sight of a woman standing a few feet from him in the red mist. He tucked the shawl temporarily under his arm, moved nearer, peered in the woman's face, which was half hidden by the flowered quilt clutched around her, and demanded, "D'you need help?"

Like the others, she neither answered nor removed her gaze from the object it had been pursuing, the cold little fat-legged toddler astray in the flame-lit void.

"D'you need help?" Andrew repeated, and in spite

of the call to haste there was a softer note in his voice, almost like a plea. He was troubled, as he had not been troubled at any time before. He had seen other faces in plenty in the past half-hour, dull and white-lipped, crawled over by strings of dank hair, discolored with bruises like this one, vacant, ugly, and impotent. But now of a sudden he felt on his quivering, daft sensibilities the impact of the raw of another life. He was aware of a crisis. He discerned it breaking in her eyes, which, before his own, seemed to grow by another diameter; he saw vividly a groping for a memory, the fight of putting away the clouds. He saw the lips fall apart to an insuck of air.

"What is it?" he implored.

Now she looked at him.

"Why—I—I've lost it."

"Lost what?"

But she had turned timorous. She avoided his eyes and pulled the quilt tighter about her face. She was like an animal that has been beaten too much. Andrew thought of that. Or in another way it was like the embarrassment one would feel, coming to bother a busy man with a little thing. But Andrew wouldn't allow it.

"No!" he declared, taking hold of the quilted shoulder. "You go on tell me now, quick. What you lost?"

He saw her lips move in the shadow. He put down his ear.

"My little baby!"

"*What!*" He unbent and took a big breath into lungs. "That ain't possible! 'Tain't possible!"

Now he *had* frightened her. She pulled the quilt quite over her head and after a moment she made to slip away, feeling the sand with furtive toes. He got hold of her shoulder again.

"You be still here!" he commanded. He had to think.

"This woman," he put to himself, "says she's gone and lost her baby. It ain't possible."

A heaviness came upon him. His eyes roved the garden of fires, cluttered with the weeds of the castaways. He had waded through all of that and he had certainly seen no babies unclaimed. His gaze penetrated the glow and came to the sea, where the ember of the ship still shone in one dull eye offshore under the wind and spray. The heaviness deepened. He felt the ocean (of which he had always been afraid) shaking the edge of the land under his feet and roaring away miles beyond count to the east and west—the hungry, cruel ocean; the cold, deep, blind, devouring sea.

" 'Tain't possible!" he wailed. He was no longer gigantic. And he had so wanted responsibility too. He had prayed for it as a little girl at Christmas prays for a doll with eyes that shut.

It was a moment to be remembered in Andrew's

life, and the sad part of it was that no one would ever remember it, not even Andrew himself.

First he swallowed the obstruction in his throat; then he shook himself all over like a spaniel that has been in the pond; then he shook the woman.

"You come along with me!" he said.

He led her toward the nearest fire. When her timidity grew too heavy for him he left her in the outer twilight and entered the circle alone. He scanned the faces, one after another, a frown between his eyes.

"Anybody here seen a baby? Anybody here seen a baby? No?"

He towed her to the next fire.

"Anybody here seen a baby?"

"What kind of a baby?" It was an old woman in a flannel nightgown that asked. She rocked back and forth, back and forth in the ember-light, with her eyes tight shut.

Andrew stepped out of the circle and went back to his charge.

"What kind of a baby was it?" he demanded. He put his ear close to the fold in the quilt.

"A little baby. A little, soft baby."

"Little, soft one," he announced, regaining the ring. Apparently that could not be the kind she was interested in, for the old rocker paid him no attention now.

Having done with discouragement once and for all, Andrew trailed his client from one group to another with a hopefulness that never dimmed.

If he had any trouble at all in him it was about the woman herself, and the trouble with her was that there was nothing any longer for his imagination to get hold of; nothing but a quilt. He had even begun to forget what she looked like. This was so much the worse for her, precisely because there was abroad just then such a surfeit of things imperative, moving and stentorian. There were children that squalled alluringly; there were women that began to emerge from stupor and wring their hands in aimless imploration; there were men that ran. One of these men almost bowled Andrew over near the last fire. He was a heavy-set, middle-aged fellow with a purple face all puffed and banged. He blundered in the sand. His eyes bulged. He waved his arms. He kept shouting at the top of his lungs, "Where's Rose? Rose Trent? Tell me where Rose Trent is!"

Here, at least, was an appeal positive and magnetic. Andrew surrendered. He grasped the man's shoulder and looked in his face.

"Here, now! you want help, don't you?"

Andrew found himself sprawling on the beach. He was not daunted. He jumped up with intention of pursuing and persisting. But as he turned, his eyes chanced to catch sight of a flowered bed-quilt fading silently into the shadow down-shore, and in his dizziness he remembered.

He found her after a few rods, where she had sunk

down on a shelf of the beach. She had uncovered her face and head now.

"Please don't bother about me any more," he heard her saying.

He sat down and hugged the red shawl, which had not escaped him through it all, between his knees.

" 'Tain't no bother." His voice was rough. He felt a little guilty. "No bother 't all. And we *gotta* find it; you know *that!*"

"No, it's no matter, no matter." Her face was set toward the surf that rose beyond the narrow interval of sand, rose and toppled and was destroyed and rose again in a continuous dike of foam, clotted with dim flame on the one hand, and on the other livid with the light of the moon that began to struggle through the flying cloud. Its roaring shook the beach. The air recoiled. All little things were drowned.

"No matter, no matter!"

The hypnotic thunder of wind and water seemed to have congealed her mind and frozen her face again. The sight of it scared Andrew, like seeing some one really dead. He called up all his scatter-pated resolution.

"Yes, 'tis a matter!" He took hold of the quilt with energy and pulled it one way and another. "I tell you 'tis! Look-a-here, a lost baby's a lot o' matter!"

It was more than ought to have been asked of any Andrew. His gaze wandered in distraction to the

sea, and, recoiling from that immense black possibility, fled back along the safe red shore. It was too lonely altogether out here in the dark.

"Come along!" he commanded. "We'll have another look and we'll find it this time sure." He dragged at her unyielding weight. He crouched before her. He rubbed his palms together with a desperate air of really getting down to business at last.

"Now le'me see. First you tell me again just what kind of a baby it was, exactly. Little, soft one, you said, didn't you?"

He put his ear down close to her face, out of the hullabaloo of the elements.

"How's that? Little, soft one, eh?"

"Oh, yes, ever and ever so soft, and heavy—and——"

She made no attempt to cover her face again, but Andrew resisted firmly.

"Yes, go on! That's right! Soft and heavy and——?"

"It's only heavy—only seems heavy because it's so little, so tiny. And it's warm. Its little, softy skin is so warm and dear against my breast. And then it tells me things. Always telling me and telling me things. Oh, before it was born even—oh, ever so long before it was born it did that—lying soft and heavy and warm by my heart in the dark of night when everything was still—telling me and telling me things in the night. Singing songs to me sometimes. Asking

me sometimes, 'Mother, my mother, and why are you afraid?' 'Oh, I'm not afraid, my baby. What makes you think I'm afraid? Foolish baby! Let me sing you a song.' "

"Yes." Andrew's head nodded thoughtfully on its twisted neck. "Yes, go on." It was hard for him to catch all the rapt words; the voice was scarcely more than a breath against the stubble of his attentive cheek. "Louder!" he said.

"And it's so sweet when it lies in my arms now; when its little lips are on me; or when it sleeps warm against me and its heart beating so tiny on mine, and so heavy. And the littlest scent of sweat in the back of its neck there, like perfume—like no perfume that there ever was in flowers. And when it dreams there, and I breathe its little dreams—it's so sweet! Oh—it's sweeter than I can bear!"

Something fell warm on the side of Andrew's chin. He looked at the woman and saw tears rolling out of her eyes. There was a feeling of flatulence and suffocation in his body, and suddenly he wept too.

He didn't want her to see. He got up and turned his back and walked a few steps away down the beach.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" He wrung his hands. The deep, inchoate tenderness of understanding whelmed his soul. Tears made a veil over his eyes, and the moon, shaking the clouds clear for a moment, threw a blistered radiance before his feet.

He hardly knew where he walked, and he had come

on dangerous ground. The surf-wall gleamed and feathered at his shoulder and roared in his ear, and when it broke the foaming outlash licked up and swirled about his ankles and sucked out the sand from under his boots. To save him he spread his legs far apart.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Through the blur of his weeping the surf-wash streamed like a wide river of milk, flowing for an instant to the right hand, faltering, running and writhing as swiftly again to the left. It swam in dissolving patterns, deep-green arabesques, whorls and clots and weed-ribbons like snakes. Creatures monstrous and impossible wallowed in the thin flood, an egg-crate shining like a silver casket, a half-charred fiddle, a woman's poppy-decked hat. And a little hand thrust out of the moonlit wrack and beckoned to the man.

Andrew jumped, went down on a knee in the water, and grabbed at it. He got his fingers around the tiny wrist. Propping himself with a stiff leg against the backwash, he gathered the fragile weight in an arm, and when the water was gone for an instant, he scrambled up the shelving slope beyond its reach.

There he paused and examined his burden diffidently, out of the bottoms of his eyes. It lay very quiet in its one wet shift, and very white against the darkness of his arm; its eyes were shut, and it made no complaint. In the fooling blue light of moon and cloud it was like a doll. Something cold began to lay

hold of Andrew. He shuddered and, surrendering to a growing panic, he shook out the red shawl to which for no reason he had continued to cling, and wrapped the disturber out of his sight, fold on fold.

He walked back toward the woman, holding it away from him on awkward arms. His feet dragged in the sand and his knees felt stiff, as they feel in nightmare.

"It's like it was nothing but a doll," he pleaded with his panic.

He arrived breathless, and dropped what he had in the woman's lap.

"There! There y'are, Missus! I found y'r baby!"

She did not appear to comprehend at first, but continued to brood at the ocean in the same empty-minded way. She was shivering a little, though, as if she began to feel the bite of the wind through the quilt. Andrew screeched about her ears, "There y'are, I tell you! There's y'r baby! Look!" Between eagerness and misgiving he clapped a hand on her head and bent it down, pointing wildly with the other at the shapeless parcel on her knees. "There's y'r baby; Missus! Honest it is!"

One of her hands fumbled out of the quilt and touched the shawl, and then retreated swiftly. She turned her gaze to Andrew, a curious little bothered pucker between the brows.

"Mine? Are—are you sure?"

"Sure? Course I'm sure! Course I am!" His feet

danced up and down in the sand; his voice broke falsetto like a boy's in his teens. "Don't you worry; that's your'n, all right!"

"Mine!"

Memory seemed to break open with that syllable. With one swift and terrible gesture the quilt was flung wide, the shawl plucked off, the quiet little creature caught to her bosom and strained there.

"Mine!" It was a pæn now. "Mine!" It was soaring.

Before Andrew knew what the woman was about she was up and a dozen yards away, leaving the quilt and the shawl where the wind flung them up the slope of the dune. She was not going anywhere at all; the gesture was as aimless as a dance. She stopped and returned a little way on bacchanalian tiptoe, tossing her white trophy on the outflung crook of an arm, flaunting it high in the face of ocean and heaven and the flame-streaked sands. She too was all white now; the wind, licking the single shift about her limbs, sculptured her being in vibrant marble, a kind of a wild "Victory" alive.

Andrew crouched where she had left him, his cheeks pressed between his hands. He did not know what he was thinking. His whole creature from head to toe was like a harp of strings, and the strings all lashing with strange tunes; flickering quavers of panic, themes cool and lucid of beauties that his mind was never meant to know, chords austere and sensuous

running like forked lightning down his night, and so many notes he could not even grasp at, and under them all the moaning discord of his own conscience and his own guilt.

It was he, Andrew, that had brought that dead thing to her, hoping against harebrained hope that she wouldn't see. And she hadn't seen. And it was so awful now!

"*Don't* do that!" he chattered. "Don't carry *on* like that!"

He clapped his hands over his eyes to keep from staring.

" 'Tain't decent!" he wailed. " 'Tain't right!"

It did him no good to close his eyes against her and leave his ears untended. She was singing. He heard it running in the roll of the surf, penetrating and binding up the million trillion idiot shoutings of the sea. It had no words. It was tone unearthly and pure. He heard it mounting from instant to instant, shaking off the laggard waves, soaring alone along the disastrous shore, and all the crazy harp in Andrew wailed and jangled in strange pain, and out of the pain there crept a portentous suspicion and a black doubt.

"Supposin' that there woman is—simple. Oh, Gawd alive!"

Some one ran and grunted near him. There began to be outcries, stentorian hails and faint replies. Andrew's eyes popped open. He saw one black figure floundering over the sand and another skipping in the

poverty-grass. Still another charged him in silhouette against the fires.

He scrambled up and ducked in front of the last one and waved his arms like a man trying to stop a train.

"Here—here! Look! I know all about this. Le'me tell you about ——"

Once again he went down sprawling under a windmill fist, and this time he lay still for a moment before he tried to get up.

The world went round and round him. He had to take pains with his feet. He wandered back on uncertain courses into the garden of fires. He saw a boy of seven crouched by one of them trying with infinite patience to put together again a little wheel-barrow painted red. The glue had gone soft in the wet.

"Here—here!" cried Andrew, kneeling beside him. "Le'me lend you a hand with that."

It was almost noontime, and the crowd had grown dense around the door of the barn-like house behind the coast-guard station, where the worst cases from the disaster had been cared for. There had been a crowd each day for the past two weeks as the quicker convalescents were brought forth; there were people everywhere now, and the island found itself in a new head-line every hour.

But this noon the crowd was bigger by half than on any noon before because the news had spread that

Rose Trent was coming out to-day. Henry Smith, the island Jehu, had washed the victoria and put on his high hat; nor was it the only high hat in the gathering this time. Men with note-pads and other men with cameras had captured all the posts of vantage, and no one had helped them more vociferously to clear the way than Andrew, the village fool.

It was one of the gala-days in Andrew's history. He had a taste for animation and he loved the sense of marshaling crowds. He was a born announcer. When a figure appeared in the doorway at last and the cinema man beside him began to grind his machine, Andrew discerned immediately that this must be the one for whom all were waiting, and the business of his existence pulled him up on his toes.

"That's her!" he cried in a loud, officious tone. He made room with his elbows and scuttled among the people, his face surcharged with the heat of importance. "That's her!" He accosted two tall, well-dressed gentlemen, strangers to the island, standing on their toes in the outer fringe.

"Yes," he informed them, "that's her."

One of the gentlemen, thanking him with a faint smile, turned and said to his companion, "Do you know, Hamit, for the first time now I think Trent is beginning to show her age. No?"

"I couldn't say. I'll confess I've never seen her anything like near to, except in her pictures. Is she really getting on, then?"

"Oh, Heavens!"

This was beyond Andrew. Peering over the heads of the crowd, it seemed to him that the woman there, leaning on the arm of a rubicund gentleman on the porch, was the most radiantly girlish creature he had ever seen. There was something so romantic and grand and lovely about her that it took his breath and made a balloon of it in his throat.

The second stranger was questioning the first.

"Who's that man with her? Do you know?"

"That's her husband. Name's Longmeadow—J. R. Longmeadow. Firm of Longmeadow, Bates."

"That shows the ignorance. I don't think I ever knew Trent had a husband."

"Oh, yes —— But do you know, Hamit, honestly, I feel sad. This racket has told —— Poor Trent!"

It was more than ever beyond Andrew. He scratched his hatless poll and retreated. Worming his way through the crowd, he announced at intervals, "That's her husband there. Poor Trent!"

It made people smile.

The little escort had won through the throng to the carriage by this time. Once settled on the rusty cushions, Trent took smiling stock of the faces upturned all about her and the sincere acclaim. She tried to rise again and throw them kisses, but her husband restrained her with one hand, while with the other he prodded Henry Smith between the shoulder-blades with his cane.

"But they're such dears!" she laughed. "All of 'em!"

"Drive on!" growled Longmeadow.

The horses pulled and shied and balked and pulled again. Henry wagged his high hat and shook his whip at the clogging crowd; Longmeadow stood up and frowned. Rose Trent paid no heed. She lay back in the seat and was content. It was as if she loved all those faces turned upon her and tried to give to each the separate recompense of a smile. There was a smile even for Andrew, and the smile did something sudden and funny to him. It seemed to go inside and jar and hurt, like a stone dropped in the gears of a machine. He licked his lips; his fingers plucked rapidly at the hem of his reefer, and his feet, hidden by all the others, executed a nervous dance.

What was wrong with him?

The crowd wouldn't open and the horses wouldn't go. Longmeadow, sensing the effect on the woman of this prolonged and cumulative homage, leaned forward and swore in Henry's ear. But his profanity was too late. Trent shook off his hand and leaped to her feet. It was so wonderful to come out on the other side of the valley of disaster and find the old bright world at her feet again.

"I adore you all!" she cried. "All of you!" It was a pæan. "All!" It was soaring. And she flung out her arms to them in a gesture unbridled and flaunt-

ing of her joy. She was dressed all in white to-day, a kind of wild "Victory" alive.

There was a roaring in Andrew's ears like the roll of surf, and in the black heaven of his brain a star swelled and exploded.

The crowd had broken at last; the carriage was under way with a rattle and a jerk. Andrew grabbed at the door-top as it went rocking by and pulled himself up on the step and clung.

"Here—here!" he cried to the lady. "Look! Wait! I know now! 'Member? It's me! *Me!* 'Member?"

She leaned toward him, and her tone was indulgent and gentle.

"What is it?"

"You know, Missus! About that—'member? About—well—now—well, how's that there baby o' yourn? 'Member?"

"That *what* of mine?"

She turned to her husband a look of humorous mystification. He busied himself with the intruder, frowning at him and striking at his fingers on the door. Henry Smith turned his high hat and observed the trouble.

"Git along out o' that, Andrew! Git! Don't you folks mind him, though. That ain't nobody but Andrew. Git, I say!" He made a play with his lash about the disturber's head.

Andrew didn't like whips. He let go his grip and

jumped, and, lighting backward, he went end over end several times in the dust, and vanished forever out of his betters' ken.

On the open road, after the crowd, there were sunshine and quietude. Trent sighed with peace and turned to her husband.

"They're all so sweet to me, so sweet!—Jim! what are you looking at me for—like that?"

"Nothing," said he. But he continued to study her. "I was only thinking," he went on. "Rose, look here—tell me honest—have you ever particularly thought of wanting a baby?"

"Baby! *Me?*"

He avoided her eyes. His cheek was redder than usual.

"I don't know why I said that, Rose. It was simply—well, it was just something about that night. When we found you, what did you have hugged tight in both arms but a big water-logged doll that some poor kid had lost. It was just the queer way you happened to be ——"

Her clear-hearted mirth stopped him.

"Oh, that's funny, Jim. I probably thought it was a life-preserver. The last thing I remember of that night was in the life-boat, grabbing and grabbing in perfect despair at one of the things—the doughnut kind—swashing around under my seat. That was it!"

"I suppose so." Longmeadow stared solemnly at his knees. "It was just that it set me thinking, some-

how—thinking maybe that somewhere in the bottom of every woman's heart—somewhere—there must be a kind of secret hankering—unconscious maybe ——"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Jim!"

She pulled him around to look at her squarely, her eyes brimming with amusement.

"Me? Now, honest, Jim! A baby! One long squall and mess! And think of my figure, man!"

Andrew picked himself up from the road, slapped the dust out of his reefer, and gazed after the retreating carriage. For an instant he had the notion of pursuit, but then he decided that it was going too fast and too far. Turning the other way, he discovered the vanguard of the returning crowd almost upon him.

As always, his brain was busy, clutching at scraps of remembered speech. He got himself planted in front of the leading couple.

"Ain't it a sad thing, though?" He wagged his head. "Poor Trent! Poor Trent!"

VII

FOOTFALLS

THIS is not an easy story; not a road for tender or for casual feet. Better the meadows. Let me warn you, it is as hard as that old man's soul and as sunless as his eyes. It has its inception in catastrophe, and its end in an act of almost incredible violence; between them it tells barely how a man, being blind, can become also deaf and dumb.

He lived in one of those old Puritan sea towns where the strain has come down austere and moribund, so that his act would not be quite unbelievable. Except that the town is no longer Puritan and Yankee. It has been betrayed; it has become an outpost of the Portuguese islands.

This man, this blind cobbler himself, was a Portuguese, from St. Michael, in the Western Islands, and his name was Boaz Negro.

He was happy. An unquenchable exuberance lived in him. When he arose in the morning he made vast, as it were uncontrollable, gestures with his stout arms. He came into his shop singing. His voice, strong and deep as the chest from which it emanated, rolled out through the doorway and along the street, and the fishermen, done with their morning work and loung-

ing and smoking along the wharfs, said, "Boaz is to work already." Then they came up to sit in the shop.

In that town a cobbler's shop is a club. One sees the interior always dimly thronged. They sit on the benches watching the artizan at his work for hours, and they talk about everything in the world. A cobbler is known by the company he keeps.

Boaz Negro kept young company. He would have nothing to do with the old. On his own head the gray hairs set thickly.

He had a grown son. But the benches in his shop were for the lusty and valiant young, men who could spend the night drinking, and then at three o'clock in the morning turn out in the rain and dark to pull at the weirs, sing songs, buffet one another among the slippery fish in the boat's bottom, and make loud jokes about the fundamental things, love and birth and death. Harkening to their boasts and strong prophecies, his breast heaved and his heart beat faster. He was a large, full-blooded fellow, fashioned for exploits; the flame in his darkness burned higher even to hear of them.

It is scarcely conceivable how Boaz Negro could have come through this much of his life still possessed of that unquenchable and priceless exuberance; how he would sing in the dawn; how, simply listening to the recital of deeds in gale or brawl, he could easily forget himself a blind man, tied to a shop and a last;

easily make of himself a lusty young fellow breasting the sunlit and adventurous tide of life.

He had had a wife, whom he had loved. Fate, which had scourged him with the initial scourge of blindness, had seen fit to take his Angelina away. He had had four sons. Three, one after another, had been removed, leaving only Manuel, the youngest. Recovering slowly, with infinite agony, from each of these recurrent blows, his unquenchable exuberance had lived. And there was another thing quite as extraordinary. He had never done anything but work, and that sort of thing may kill the flame where an abrupt catastrophe fails. Work in the dark. Work, work, work! And accompanied by privation; an almost miserly scale of personal economy. Yes, indeed, he had "skinned his fingers," especially in the earlier years. When it tells most.

How he had worked! Not alone in the daytime, but also, sometimes, when orders were heavy, far into the night. It was strange for one, passing along that deserted street at midnight, to hear issuing from the black shop of Boaz Negro the rhythmical tap-tap-tap of hammer on wooden peg.

Nor was that sound all: no man in town could get far past that shop in his nocturnal wandering unobserved. No more than a dozen footfalls, and from the darkness Boaz's voice rolled forth, fraternal, stentorian, "Good night, Antone!" "Good night to you, Caleb Snow!"

To Boaz Negro it was still broad day.

Now, because of this, he was what might be called a substantial man. He owned his place, his shop, opening on the sidewalk, and behind it the dwelling-house with trellised galleries up-stairs and down.

And there was always something for his son, a "piece for the pocket," a dollar, five, even a ten-dollar bill if he had "got to have it." Manuel was "a good boy." Boaz not only said this; he felt that he was assured of it in his understanding, to the infinite peace of his heart.

It was curious that he should be ignorant only of the one nearest to him. Not because he was physically blind. Be certain he knew more of other men and of other men's sons than they or their neighbors did. More, that is to say, of their hearts, their understandings, their idiosyncrasies, and their ultimate weight in the balance-pan of eternity.

His simple explanation of Manuel was that Manuel "wasn't too stout." To others he said this, and to himself. Manuel was not indeed too robust. How should he be vigorous when he never did anything to make him so? He never worked. Why should he work, when existence was provided for, and when there was always that "piece for the pocket"? Even a ten-dollar bill on a Saturday night! No. Manuel "wasn't too stout."

In the shop they let it go at that. The missteps and frailties of every one else in the world were can-

vassed there with the most shameless publicity. But Boaz Negro was a blind man, and in a sense their host. Those reckless, strong young fellows respected and loved him. It was allowed to stand at that. Manuel was "a good boy." Which did not prevent them, by the way, from joining later in the general condemnation of that father's laxity—"the ruination of the boy!"

"He should have put him to work, that's what."

"He should have said to Manuel, 'Look here, if you want a dollar, go earn it first.' "

As a matter of fact, only one man ever gave Boaz the advice direct. That was Campbell Wood. And Wood never sat in that shop.

In every small town there is one young man who is spoken of as "rising." As often as not he is not a native, but "from away."

In this town Campbell Wood was that man. He had come from another part of the State to take a place in the bank. He lived in the upper story of Boaz Negro's house, the ground floor now doing for Boaz and the meager remnant of his family. The old woman who came in to tidy up for the cobbler looked after Wood's rooms as well.

Dealing with Wood, one had first of all the sense of his incorruptibility. A little ruthless perhaps, as if one could imagine him, in defense of his integrity, cutting off his friend, cutting off his own hand, cutting

off the very stream flowing out from the wellsprings of human kindness. An exaggeration, perhaps.

He was by long odds the most eligible young man in town, good-looking in a spare, ruddy, sandy-haired Scottish fashion, important, incorruptible, "rising." But he took good care of his heart. Precisely that; like a sharp-eyed duenna to his own heart. One felt that here was the man, if ever was the man, who held his destiny in his own hand. Failing, of course, some quite gratuitous and unforeseeable catastrophe.

Not that he was not human, or even incapable of laughter or passion. He was, in a way, immensely accessible. He never clapped one on the shoulder; on the other hand, he never failed to speak. Not even to Boaz.

Returning from the bank in the afternoon, he had always a word for the cobbler. Passing out again to supper at his boarding-place, he had another, about the weather, the prospects of rain. And if Boaz was at work in the dark when he returned from an evening at the Board of Trade, there was a "Good night, Mr. Negro!"

On Boaz's part, his attitude toward his lodger was curious and paradoxical. He did not pretend to anything less than reverence for the young man's position; precisely on account of that position he was conscious toward Wood of a vague distrust. This was because he was an uneducated fellow.

To the uneducated the idea of large finance is as

uncomfortable as the idea of the law. It must be said for Boaz that, responsive to Wood's unfailing civility, he fought against the sensation of dim and somehow shameful distrust.

Nevertheless his whole parental soul was in arms that evening when, returning from the bank and finding the shop empty of loungers, Wood paused a moment to propose the bit of advice already referred to.

"Haven't you ever thought of having Manuel learn the trade?"

A suspicion, a kind of premonition, lighted the fires of defense.

"Shoemaking," said Boaz, "is good enough for a blind man."

"Oh, I don't know. At least it's better than doing nothing at all."

Boaz's hammer was still. He sat silent, monumental. Outwardly. For once his unfailing response had failed him, "Manuel ain't too stout, you know." Perhaps it had become suddenly inadequate.

He hated Wood; he despised Wood; more than ever before, a hundredfold more, quite abruptly, he distrusted Wood.

How could a man say such things as Wood had said? And where Manuel himself might hear!

Where Manuel *had* heard! Boaz's other emotions —hatred of contempt and distrust—were overshadowed. Sitting in darkness, no sound had come to his ears, no footfall, no infinitesimal creaking of a floor-

plank. Yet by some sixth uncanny sense of the blind he was aware that Manuel was standing in the dusk of the entry joining the shop to the house.

Boaz made a Herculean effort. The voice came out of his throat, harsh, bitter, and loud enough to have carried ten times the distance to his son's ears.

"Manuel is a good boy!"

"Yes—h'm—yes—I suppose so."

Wood shifted his weight. He seemed uncomfortable.

"Well, I'll be running along, I—ugh! Heavens!"

Something was happening. Boaz heard exclamations, breathings, the rustle of sleeve-cloth in large, frantic, and futile graspings—all without understanding. Immediately there was an impact on the floor, and with it the unmistakable clink of metal. Boaz even heard that the metal was minted, and that the coins were gold. He understood. A coin-sack, gripped not quite carefully enough for a moment under the other's overcoat, had shifted, slipped, escaped, and fallen.

And Manuel had heard!

It was a dreadful moment for Boaz, dreadful in its native sense, as full of dread. Why? It was a moment of horrid revelation, ruthless clarification. His son, his link with the departed Angelina, that "good boy"—Manuel, standing in the shadow of the entry, visible alone to the blind, had heard the clink of falling gold, and—*and Boaz wished that he had not!*

There, amazing, disconcerting, destroying, stood the sudden fact.

Sitting as impassive and monumental as ever, his strong, bleached hands at rest on his work, round drops of sweat came out on Boaz's forehead. He scarcely took the sense of what Wood was saying. Only fragments.

"Government money, understand—for the breakwater workings—huge—too many people know, here, everywhere—don't trust the safe—tin safe—'Noah's Ark'—give you my word—Heavens, no!"

It boiled down to this—the money, more money than was good for that antiquated "Noah's Ark" at the bank—and whose contemplated sojourn there overnight was public to too many minds—in short, Wood was not only incorruptible, he was canny. To what one of those minds, now, would it occur that he should take away that money bodily, under casual cover of his coat, to his own lodgings behind the cobbler-shop of Boaz Negro? For this one, this important, night!

He was sorry the coin-sack had slipped, because he did not like to have the responsibility of secret sharer cast upon any one, even upon Boaz, even by accident. On the other hand, how tremendously fortunate that it had been Boaz and not another. So far as that went, Wood had no more anxiety now than before. One incorruptible knows another.

"I'd trust you, Mr. Negro" (that was one of the fragments which came and stuck in the cobbler's

brain), "as far as I would myself. As long as it's only you. I'm just going up here and throw it under the bed. Oh, yes, certainly."

Boaz ate no supper. For the first time in his life food was dry in his gullet. Even under those other successive crushing blows of Fate the full and generous habit of his functionings had carried on unabated; he had always eaten what was set before him. To-night, over his untouched plate, he watched Manuel with his sightless eyes, keeping track of his every mouthful, word, intonation, breath. What profit he expected to extract from this catlike surveillance it is impossible to say.

When they arose from the supper-table Boaz made another Herculean effort. "Manuel, you're a good boy!"

The formula had a quality of appeal, of despair, and of command.

"Manuel, you should be short of money, maybe. Look, what's this? A tenner? Well, there's a piece for the pocket; go and enjoy yourself."

He would have been frightened had Manuel, upsetting tradition, declined the offering. With the morbid contrariness of the human imagination, the boy's avid grasping gave him no comfort.

He went out into the shop, where it was already dark, drew to him his last, his tools, mallets, cutters, pegs, leather. And having prepared to work, he remained idle. He found himself listening.

It has been observed that the large phenomena of sunlight and darkness were nothing to Boaz Negro. A busy night was broad day. Yet there was a difference; he knew it with the blind man's eyes, the ears.

Day was a vast confusion, or rather a wide fabric, of sounds; great and little sounds all woven together, voices, footfalls, wheels, far-off whistles and foghorns, flies buzzing in the sun. Night was another thing. Still there were voices and footfalls, but rare, emerging from the large, pure body of silence as definite, surprizing, and yet familiar entities.

To-night there was an easterly wind, coming off the water and carrying the sound of waves. So far as other fugitive sounds were concerned it was the same as silence. The wind made little difference to the ears. It nullified, from one direction at least, the other two visual processes of the blind, the sense of touch and the sense of smell. It blew away from the shop, toward the living-house.

As has been said, Boaz found himself listening, scrutinizing with an extraordinary attention this immense background of sound. He heard footfalls. The story of that night was written, for him, in footfalls.

He heard them moving about the house, the lower floor, prowling here, there, halting for long spaces, advancing, retreating softly on the planks. About this aimless, interminable perambulation there was something to twist the nerves, something led and at the

same time driven, like a succession of frail and indecisive charges.

Joseph ~~Boaz~~ lifted himself from his chair. All his impulse called him to make a stir, join battle, cast in the breach the reënforcement of his presence, ~~authority, good will.~~ He sank back again; his hands fell down. The curious impotence of the spectator held him.

He heard footfalls, too, on the upper floor, a little fainter, borne to the inner rather than the outer ear, along the solid causeway of partitions and floor, the legs of his chair, the bony framework of his body. Very faint indeed. Sinking back easily into the background of the wind. ~~They, too, came and went, this room, that, to the passage, the stair-head, and away.~~ About them too there was the same quality of being led and at the same time of being driven.

Time went by. In his darkness it seemed to Joseph ~~Boaz~~ that hours must have passed. He heard voices. Together with the footfalls, that abrupt, brief, and ~~(in view of Wood's position)~~ astounding interchange of sentences made up his history of the night. Wood must have opened the door at the head of the stair; by the sound of his voice he would be standing there, peering below perhaps; perhaps listening.

"What's wrong down there?" he called. "Why don't you go to bed?"

After a moment, came Manuel's voice, "Ain't sleepy."

"Neither am I. Look here, do you like to play cards?"

"What kind? Euchre? I like euchre all right. Or pitch."

"Well, what would you say to coming up and having a game of pitch then, Manuel? If you can't sleep?"

"That'd be all right."

The lower footfalls ascended to join the footfalls on the upper floor. There was the sound of a door closing.

Boaz sat still. In the gloom he might have been taken for a piece of furniture, of machinery, an extraordinary lay-figure, perhaps, for the trying on of the boots he made. He seemed scarcely to breathe, only the sweat starting from his brow giving him an aspect of life.

He ought to have run, and leaped up that inner stair and pounded with his fists on that door. He seemed unable to move. At rare intervals feet passed on the sidewalk outside, just at his elbow, so to say, and yet somehow, to-night, immeasurably far away. Beyond the orbit of the moon. He heard Rugg, the policeman, noting the silence of the shop, muttering, "Boaz is to bed to-night," as he passed.

The wind increased. It poured against the shop with its deep, continuous sound of a river. Submerged in its body, Boaz caught the note of the town bell striking midnight.

Once more, after a long time, he heard footfalls. He heard them coming around the corner of the shop from the house, footfalls half swallowed by the wind, passing discreetly, without haste, retreating, merging step by step with the huge, incessant background of the wind.

Boaz's muscles tightened all over him. He had the impulse to start up, to fling open the door, shout into the night, "What are you doing? Stop there! Say! What are you doing and where are you going?"

And as before, the curious impotence of the spectator held him motionless. He had not stirred in his chair. And those footfalls, upon which hinged, as it were, that momentous decade of his life, were gone.

There was nothing to listen for now. Yet he continued to listen. Once or twice, half arousing himself, he drew toward him his unfinished work. And then relapsed into immobility.

As has been said, the wind, making little difference to the ears, made all the difference in the world with the sense of feeling and the sense of smell. From the one important direction of the house. That is how it could come about that Boaz Negro could sit, waiting and listening to nothing in the shop and remain ignorant of disaster until the alarm had gone away and come back again, pounding, shouting, clanging.

"*Fire!*" he heard them bawling in the street. "*Fire! Fire!*"

Only slowly did he understand that the fire was in his own house.

THERE is nothing stiller in the world than the skeleton of a house in the dawn after a fire. It is as if everything living, positive, violent, had been completely drained in the one flaming act of violence, leaving nothing but negation till the end of time. It is worse than a tomb. A monstrous stillness! Even the footfalls of the searchers can not disturb it, for they are separate and superficial. In its presence they are almost frivolous.

Half an hour after dawn the searchers found the body, if what was left from that consuming ordeal might be called a body. The discovery came as a shock. It seemed incredible that the occupant of that house, no cripple or invalid, but an able man in the prime of youth, should not have awakened and made good his escape. It was the upper floor which had caught; the stairs had stood to the last. It was beyond calculation. Even if he had been asleep!

And he had not been asleep. This second and infinitely more appalling discovery began to be known. Slowly. By a hint, a breath of rumor here; there an allusion, half taken back. The man, whose incinerated body still lay curled in its bed of cinders, had been dressed at the moment of disaster; even to the watch, the cuff-buttons, the studs, the very scarf-pin. Fully clothed to the last detail, precisely as those who

had dealings at the bank might have seen Campbell Wood any week-day morning for the past eight months. A man does not sleep with his clothes on. The skull of the man had been broken, as if with a blunt instrument of iron. On the charred lacework of the floor lay the leg of an old andiron with which Boaz Negro and his Angelina had set up housekeeping in that new house.

It needed only Mr. Asa Whitelaw, coming up the street from that gaping "Noah's Ark" at the bank, to round out the scandalous circle of circumstance.

"Where is Manuel?"

Boaz Negro still sat in his shop, impassive, monumental, his thick, hairy arms resting on the arms of his chair. The tools and materials of his work remained scattered about him, as his irresolute gathering of the night before had left them. Into his eyes no change could come. He had lost his house, the visible monument of all those years of "skinning his fingers." It would seem that he had lost his son. And he had lost something incalculably precious—that hitherto unquenchable exuberance of the man.

"Where is Manuel?"

When he spoke his voice was unaccented and stale, like the voice of a man already dead.

"Yes, where is Manuel?"

He had answered them with their own question.

"When did you last see him?"

Neither he nor they seemed to take note of that profound irony.

"At supper."

"Tell us, Boaz, you knew about this money?"

The cobbler nodded his head.

"And did Manuel?"

He might have taken sanctuary in a legal doubt. How did he know what Manuel knew? Precisely! As before, he nodded his head.

"After supper, Boaz, you were in the shop? But you heard something?"

"Yes."

He went on to tell them what he had heard, the footfalls, below and above, the extraordinary conversation which had broken for a moment the silence of the inner hall. The account was bare, the phrases monosyllabic. He reported only what had been registered on the sensitive tympanums of his ears, to the last whisper of footfalls stealing past the dark wall of the shop. Of all the formless tangle of thoughts, suspicions, interpretations, and the special and personal knowledge given to the blind which moved in his brain, he said nothing.

He shut his lips there. He felt himself on the defensive. Just as he distrusted the higher ramifications of finance (his house had gone down uninsured), so before the rites and processes of that inscrutable creature, the Law, he felt himself menaced by the

invisible and the unknown, helpless, oppressed; in an abject sense, skeptical.

"Keep clear of the Law!" they had told him in his youth. The monster his imagination had summoned then still stood beside him in his age.

Having exhausted his monosyllabic and superficial evidence, they could move him no farther. He became deaf and dumb. He sat before them, an image cast in some immensely heavy stuff, inanimate. His lack of visible emotion impressed them. Remembering his exuberance, it was only the stranger to see him unmoving and unmoved. Only once did they catch sight of something beyond. As they were preparing to leave he opened his mouth. What he said was like a swan-song to the years of his exuberant happiness. Even now there was no color of expression in his words, which sounded mechanical.

"Now I have lost everything. My house. My last son. Even my honor. You would not think I would like to live. But I go to live. I go to work. That *cachorra*, one day he shall come back again, in the dark night, to have a look. I shall go to show you all. That *cachorra!*"

(And from that time on, it was noted, he never referred to the fugitive by any other name than *cachorra*, which is a gender of dog. "That *cachorra!*" As if he had forfeited the relationship not only of the family, but of the very genus, the very race! "That *cachorra!*")

He pronounced this resolution without passion. When they assured him that the culprit would come back again indeed, much sooner than he expected, "with a rope around his neck," he shook his head slowly.

"No, you shall not catch that *cachorra* now. But one day ——"

There was something about its very colorlessness which made it sound oracular. It was at least prophetic. They searched, laid their traps, proceeded with all their placards, descriptions, rewards, clues, trails. But on Manuel Negro they never laid their hands.

Months passed and became years. Boaz Negro did not rebuild his house. He might have done so, out of his earnings, for upon himself he spent scarcely anything, reverting to his old habit of an almost miserly economy. Yet perhaps it would have been harder after all. For his earnings were less and less. In that town a cobbler who sits in an empty shop is apt to want for trade. Folk take their boots to mend where they take their bodies to rest and their minds to be edified.

No longer did the walls of Boaz's shop resound to the boastful recollections of young men. Boaz had changed. He had become not only different, but opposite. A metaphor will do best. The spirit of Boaz Negro had been a meadowed hillside giving upon the open sea, the sun, the warm, wild winds from beyond

the blue horizon. And covered with flowers, always hungry and thirsty for the sun and the fabulous wind and bright showers of rain. It had become an entrenched camp, lying silent, sullen, verdureless, under a gray sky. He stood solitary against the world. His approaches were closed. He was blind, and he was also deaf and dumb.

Against that, what can young fellows do who wish for nothing but to rest themselves and talk about their friends and enemies? They had come and they had tried. They had raised their voices even higher than before. Their boasts had grown louder, more presumptuous, more preposterous, until, before the cold separation of that unmoving and as if contemptuous presence in the cobbler's chair, they burst of their own air, like toy balloons. And they went and left Boaz alone.

There was another thing which served, if not to keep them away, at least not to entice them back. That was the aspect of the place. It was not cheerful. It invited no one. In its way that fire-bitten ruin grew to be almost as great a scandal as the act itself had been. It was plainly an eyesore. A valuable property, on the town's main thoroughfare—and an eyesore! The neighboring owners protested.

Their protestations might as well have gone against a stone wall. That man was deaf and dumb. He had become, in a way, a kind of vegetable, for the quality of a vegetable is that, while it is endowed with

life, it remains fixed in one spot. For years Boaz was scarcely seen to move foot out of that shop that was left him, a small, square, blistered promontory on the shores of ruin.

He must indeed have carried out some rudimentary sort of a domestic program under the débris at the rear (he certainly did not sleep or eat in the shop). One or two lower rooms were left fairly intact. The outward aspect of the place was formless; it grew to be no more than a mound in time; the charred timbers, one or two still standing, lean and naked against the sky, lost their blackness and faded to a silvery gray. It would have seemed strange, had they not grown accustomed to the thought, to imagine that blind man, like a mole, or some slow slug, turning himself mysteriously in the bowels of that gray mound—that time-silvered "eyesore."

When they saw him, however, he was in the shop. They opened the door to take in their work (when other cobblers turned them off), and they saw him seated in his chair in the half-darkness, his whole person, legs, torso, neck, head, as motionless as the vegetable of which we have spoken—only his hands and his bare arms endowed with visible life. The gloom had bleached the skin to the color of damp ivory, and against the background of his immobility they moved with a certain amazing monstrousness, interminably. No, they were never still. One wondered what they could be at. Surely he could not have had enough

work now to keep those insatiable hands so monstrously in motion. Even far into the night. Tap-tap-tap! Blows continuous and powerful. On what? On nothing? On the bare iron last? And for what purpose? To what conceivable end?

Well, one could imagine those arms, growing paler, also growing thicker and more formidable with that unceasing labor; the muscles feeding themselves omnivorously on their own waste, the cords toughening, the bone-tissues revitalizing themselves without end. One could imagine the whole aspiration of that mute and motionless man pouring itself out into those pallid arms, and the arms taking it up with a kind of blind greed. Storing it up. Against a day!

"That *cachorra!* One day ——"

What were the thoughts of the man? What moved within that motionless cranium covered with long hair? Who can say? Behind everything, of course, stood that bitterness against the world—the blind world—blinder than he would ever be. And against "that *cachorra.*" But this was no longer a thought; it was the man.

Just as all muscular aspiration flowed into his arms, so all the energies of his senses turned to his ears. The man had become, you might say, two arms and two ears. Can you imagine a man listening, intently, through the waking hours of nine years?

Listening to footfalls. Marking with a special emphasis of concentration the beginning, rise, full pas-

sage, falling away, and dying of all the footfalls. By day, by night, Winter and Summer and Winter again. Unraveling the skein of footfalls passing up and down the street!

For three years he wondered when they would come. For the next three years he wondered if they would ever come. It was during the last three that a doubt began to trouble him. It gnawed at his huge moral strength. Like a hidden seepage of water, it undermined (in anticipation) his terrible resolution. It was a sign perhaps of age, a slipping away of the reckless infallibility of youth.

Supposing, after all, that his ears should fail him. Supposing they were capable of being tricked, without his being able to know it. Supposing that that *cachorra* should come and go, and he, Boaz, living in some vast delusion, some unrealized distortion of memory, should let him pass unknown. Supposing precisely this thing had already happened!

Or the other way around. What if he should hear the footfalls coming, even into the very shop itself. What if he should be as sure of them as of his own soul? What, then, if he should strike? And what, then, if it were not that *cachorra* after all? How many tens and hundreds of millions of people were there in the world? Was it possible for them all to have footfalls distinct and different?

Then they would take him and hang him. And that

cachorra might then come and go at his own will, undisturbed.

As he sat there sometimes the sweat rolled down his nose, cold as rain.

Supposing!

Sometimes, quite suddenly, in broad day, in the booming silence of the night, he would start. Not outwardly. But beneath the pale integument of his skin all his muscles tightened and his nerves sang. His breathing stopped. It seemed almost as if his heart stopped.

Was that it? Were those the feet, there, emerging faintly from the distance? Yes, there was something about them. Yes! Memory was in travail. Yes, yes, yes! No! How could he be sure? Ice ran down into his empty eyes. The footfalls were already passing. They were gone, swallowed up already by time and space. Had that been that *cachorra?*

Nothing in his life had been so hard to meet as this insidious drain of distrust in his own powers; this sense of a traitor within the walls. His iron-gray hair had turned white. It was always this now, from the beginning of the day to the end of the night; how was he to know? How was he to be inevitably, unshakably sure?

Curiously, after all this purgatory of doubts, he did know them. For a moment at least, when he had heard them, he was unshakably sure.

It was on an evening of the Winter holidays, the

Portuguese festival of *Menin' Jesus*. Christ was born again in a hundred mangers on a hundred tiny altars; there was cake and wine; songs went shouting by to the accompaniment of mandolins and tramping feet. The wind blew cold under a clear sky. In all the houses there were lights; even in Boaz Negro's shop a lamp was lit just now, for a man had been in for a pair of boots which Boaz had patched. The man had gone out again. Boaz was thinking of blowing out the light. It meant nothing to him.

He leaned forward, judging the position of the lamp-chimney by the heat on his face, and puffed out his cheeks to blow. Then his cheeks collapsed suddenly, and he sat back again.

It was not odd that he had failed to hear the footfalls until they were actually within the door. A crowd of merrymakers was passing just then; their songs and tramping almost shook the shop.

Boaz sat back. Beneath his passive exterior his nerves thrummed; his muscles had grown as hard as wood. Yes! Yes! But no! He had heard nothing; no more than a single step, a single foot-pressure on the planks within the door. Dear God! He could not tell!

Going through the pain of an enormous effort, he opened his lips.

"What can I do for you?"

"Well, I—I don't know. To tell the truth ——"

The voice was unfamiliar, but it might be assumed.

Boaz held himself. His face remained blank, interrogating, slightly helpless.

"I am a little deaf," he said. "Come nearer."

The footfalls came half-way across the intervening floor, and there appeared to hesitate. The voice, too, had a note of uncertainty.

"I was just looking around. I have a pair of—well, you mend shoes?"

Boaz nodded his head. It was not in response to the words, for they meant nothing. What he had heard were the footfalls on the floor.

Now he was sure. As has been said, for a moment at least after he had heard them he was unshakably sure. The congestion of his muscles had passed. He was at peace.

The voice became audible once more. Before the massive preoccupation of the blind man it became still less certain of itself.

"Well, I haven't got the shoes with me. I was—just looking around."

It was amazing to Boaz, this miraculous sensation of peace.

"Wait!" Then, bending his head as if listening to the Winter wind, "It's cold to-night. You've left the door open. But wait!" Leaning down, his hand fell on a rope's end hanging by the chair. The gesture was one continuous, undeviating movement of the hand. No hesitation. No groping. How many hundreds,

how many thousands of times, had his hand schooled itself in that gesture!

A single strong pull. With a little *bang* the front door had swung to and latched itself. Not only the front door. The other door, leading to the rear, had closed too and latched itself with a little *bang*. And leaning forward from his chair, Boaz blew out the light.

There was not a sound in the shop. Outside, feet continued to go by, ringing on the frozen road; voices were lifted; the wind hustled about the corners of the wooden shell with a continuous, shrill note of whistling. All of this outside, as on another planet. Within the blackness of the shop the complete silence persisted.

Boaz listened. Sitting on the edge of his chair, half-crouching, his head, with its long, unkempt, white hair, bent slightly to one side, he concentrated upon this chambered silence the full powers of his senses. He hardly breathed. The other person in that room could not be breathing at all, it seemed.

No, there was not a breath, not the stirring of a sole on wood, not the infinitesimal rustle of any fabric. It was as if in this utter stoppage of sound, even the blood had ceased to flow in the veins and arteries of that man, who was like a rat caught in a trap.

It was appalling even to Boaz; even to the cat. Listening became more than a labor. He began to have to fight against a growing impulse to shout out loud, to leap, sprawl forward without aim in that un-

stirred darkness—do something. Sweat rolled down from behind his ears, into his shirt-collar. He gripped the chair-arms. To keep quiet he sank his teeth into his lower lip. He would not! He would not!

And of a sudden he heard before him, in the center of the room, an outburst of breath, an outrush from lungs in the extremity of pain, thick, laborious, fearful. A coughing up of dammed air.

Pushing himself from the arms of the chair, Boaz leaped.

His fingers, passing swiftly through the air, closed on something. It was a sheaf of hair, bristly and thick. It was a man's beard.

On the road outside, up and down the street for a hundred yards, merrymaking people turned to look at one another. With an abrupt cessation of laughter, of speech. Inquiringly. Even with an unconscious dilation of the pupils of their eyes.

"What was that?"

There had been a scream. There could be no doubt of that. A single, long-drawn note. Immensely high-pitched. Not as if it were human.

"God's sake! What was that? Where'd it come from?"

Those nearest said it came from the cobbler-shop of Boaz Negro.

They went and tried the door. It was closed; even locked, as if for the night. There was no light behind

the window-shade. But Boaz would not have a light. They beat on the door. No answer.

But from where, then, had that prolonged, as if animal, note come?

They ran about, penetrating into the side-lanes, interrogating, prying. Coming back at last, inevitably, to the neighborhood of Boaz Negro's shop.

The body lay on the floor at Boaz's feet, where it had tumbled down slowly after a moment from the spasmodic embrace of his arms; those ivory-colored arms which had beaten so long upon the bare iron surface of a last. Blows continuous and powerful! It seemed incredible. They were so weak now. They could not have lifted the hammer now.

But that beard! That bristly, thick, square beard of a stranger!

His hands remembered it. Standing with his shoulders fallen forward and his weak arms hanging down, Boaz began to shiver. The whole thing was incredible. What was on the floor there, upheld in the vast gulf of darkness, he could not see. Neither could he hear it; smell it. Nor (if he did not move his foot) could he feel it. What he did not hear, smell, or touch did not exist. It was not there. Incredible!

But that beard! All the accumulated doubtings of those years fell down upon him. After all, the thing he had been so fearful of in his weak imaginings had happened. He had killed a stranger. He, Boaz Negro, had murdered an innocent man!

And all on account of that beard. His deep panic made him light-headed. He began to confuse cause and effect. If it were not for that beard, it would have been that *cachorra.*

On this basis he began to reason with a crazy directness. And to act. He went and pried open the door into the entry. From a shelf he took down his razor. A big, heavy-heeled blade, made long ago for a beard which turned the jaw black again an hour after shaving. And the old, brown, polished strop. His hands began to hurry. And the mug, half full of soap. And water. It would have to be cold water. But after all, he thought (light-headedly), at this time of night ——

Outside, they were at the shop again. The crowd's habit is to forget a thing quickly, once it is out of sight and hearing. But there had been something about that solitary cry which continued to bother them, even in memory. Where had it been? Where had it come from? And those who had stood nearest the cobbler-shop were heard again. They were certain now, dead certain. They could swear!

In the end they broke down the door.

If Boaz heard them he gave no sign. An absorption as complete as it was monstrous wrapped him. Kneeling in the glare of the lantern they had brought, as impervious as his own shadow sprawling behind him, he continued to shave the dead man on the floor.

No one touched him. Their minds and imaginations were arrested by the gigantic proportions of the act.

The unfathomable presumption of the act. As throwing murder in their faces to the tune of a jig in a barber-shop. It is a fact that none of them so much as thought of touching him. No less than all of them, together with all other men, shorn of their imaginations—that is to say, the expressionless and imperturbable creature of the Law—would be sufficient to touch that ghastly man.

On the other hand, they could not leave him alone. They could not go away. They watched. They saw the damp, lather-soaked beard of that victimized stranger falling away, stroke by stroke of the flashing, heavy razor. The dead denuded by the blind!

It was seen that Boaz was about to speak. It was something important he was to utter; something, one would say, fatal. The words would not come all at once. They swelled his cheeks out. His razor was arrested. Lifting his face, he encircled the watchers with a gaze at once of imploration and of command. As if he could see them. As if he could read his answer in the expressions of their faces.

"Tell me one thing now. Is it that *cachorra?*"

For the first time those men in the room made sounds. They shuffled their feet. It was as if an uncontrollable impulse to ejaculation, laughter, derision, forbidden by the presence of death, had gone down into their boot-soles.

"Manuel?" one of them said. "You mean *Manuel?*"

Boaz laid the razor down on the floor beside its

work. He got up from his knees slowly, as if his joints hurt. He sat down in his chair, rested his hands on the arms, and once more encircled the company with his sightless gaze.

"Not Manuel. Manuel was a good boy. But tell me now, is it that *cachorra?*"

Here was something out of their calculations; something for them, mentally, to chew on. Mystification is a good thing sometimes. It gives the brain a fillip, stirs memory, puts the gears of imagination in mesh. One man, an old, tobacco-chewing fellow, began to stare harder at the face on the floor. Something moved in his intellect.

"No, but look here now, by God ——"

He had even stopped chewing. But he was forestalled by another.

"Say now, if it don't look like that fellow Wood, himself. The bank fellow—that was burned—remember? Himself."

"That *cachorra* was not burned. Not that Wood. You damned fool!"

Boaz spoke from his chair. They hardly knew his voice, emerging from its long silence; it was so didactic and arid.

"That *cachorra* was not burned. It was my boy that was burned. It was that *cachorra* called my boy up-stairs. That *cachorra* killed my boy. That *cachorra* put his clothes on my boy, and he set my house on fire. I knew that all the time. Because when

I heard those feet come out of my house and go away, I knew they were the feet of that *cachorra* from the bank. I did not know where he was going to. Something said to me—you better ask him where he is going to. But then I said, you are foolish. He had the money from the bank. I did not know. And then my house was on fire. No, it was not my boy that went away; it was that *cachorra* all the time. You damned fools! Did you think I was waiting for my own boy?"

"Now I show you all," he said at the end. "And now I can get hanged."

No one ever touched Boaz Negro for that murder. For murder it was in the eye and letter of the Law. But the Law in a small town is sometimes a curious creature; it is sometimes blind only in one eye.

Their minds and imaginations in that town were arrested by the romantic proportions of the act. Simply, no one took it up. I believe the man, Wood, was understood to have died of heart-failure.

When they asked Boaz why he had not told what he knew as to the identity of that fugitive in the night, he seemed to find it hard to say exactly. How could a man of no education define for them his own but half-defined misgivings about the Law, his sense of oppression, constraint and awe, of being on the defensive, even, in an abject way, his skepticism? About

his wanting, come what might, to "keep clear of the Law?"

He did say this, "You would have laughed at me."

And this, "If I told folks it was Wood went away, then I say he would not dare come back again."

That was the last. Very shortly he began to refuse to talk about the thing at all. The act was completed. Like the creature of fable, it had consumed itself. Out of that old man's consciousness it had departed. Amazingly. Like a dream dreamed out.

Slowly at first, in a makeshift, piece-at-a-time, poor man's way, Boaz commenced to rebuild his house. That "eyesore" vanished.

And slowly at first, like the miracle of a green shoot pressing out from the dead earth, that priceless and unquenchable exuberance of the man was seen returning. Unquenchable, after all.

VIII

NEVER ANYTHING THAT FADES . . .

BERYL SUMMERHAZE loved pretty things, and things are prettiest when they are new. In the garden at Wood Island Crossing where she and Marta Summerhaze, her mother, lived all the warm months of the year, the pageant of bud and bloom was almost more, some weeks, than the child's heart could bear; almost like the buds themselves it swelled and was in her throat, so that she could hardly breathe enough to follow fast enough to keep on the heels of the wind of quickening; no more had she caught it one dawn opening the eyes of the rose-mallows, than there it was the garden's width away at evening, painting the buttons on the delphinium spires the little blue of promise; and no more that than Disstan would be saying, "You must keep an eye on the crimson gaillardia, young Miss; they'll be blazing away fit to blind you any day now."

Disstan, the gardener, clod-footed, bright-eyed fellow, as shrewdly as any violinist with million-dollar fingers, he knew his craft of keeping the new note flying. Long in advance, deep in autumn, early in springtime, he composed his processionals and fingered his runs, his trills, and chromatic caracoles, previsioning

with a pure gusto, as a great-great-grandfather might of inheritors not yet born, the held breath and lighted eyes of this pair that peopled his aging summers, Marta, a reed blown and singing in a sunny wind, and Beryl, as like as like, exquisite tiptoe nine-year-old.

Sometimes, worship as he might, he was moved to smile at them with an indulgent wist. They never saw the garden he made for them. Like the man who couldn't see the woods for the trees, they could never see the blossoms for the buds. For the triumphant full chord of his contriving, the panoply of massed and blended bloom, they seemed never to care to wait. At the full of any flower, already one petal will be drooping, already a worm may be lying secret in its heart. And so, long and long before that danger, almost before it was dry of the dew of its first unfolding, Marta must have it cut and carted away, giving room for another to bud and breathe its pale, beginning sweetness a moment before it too went into the barrow and out to the humus pile.

"But, Lady!" Disstan was never through protesting, however humbly.

The slender white-and-golden woman with the drinking lips would hush him there with her own protest, quick sadness in her smile. "You can't love them as I do, Disstan, or you couldn't bear stand by and watch them fade."

No, he couldn't have loved them in Marta's and Beryl's way. To him their fading was their ripening,

their beauty but come to its tide then; in withering corolla and fattening seed-sack *his* eyes saw showering already the ten thousand buds of next year, and those two on tiptoe, enchanted again.

Woman, child, without ever seeming to know it, they gave Disstan the best of it all for his own; they gave him the autumn to do with as he pleased. It took a little of the desolation out of their going away, the thought of the garden left to run riot to its heart's content through a last month or so of frost and flame. It made it easier to say to Marta one day in September, "The russet chrysanthemums are out this morning, Lady," knowing as he did that she knew that after them there was nothing more new to come.

Then Disstan could look to see a business in the house, a turbulence of strong men in overalls spinning trunks like tops over his wincing turf plots, and then perhaps, days later, rueful, one of the regimented gentlemen who would have been but too happy to lay themselves down for Martin Summerhaze's widow and child to walk on, halted between the cedars outside the nailed-up gate to read the sign about trespassing which he, Disstan, had hung there.

Disstan gave the garden its way now. For a while he never touched trowel, rake, or shears, but he would idle for hours, nodding from time to time like a benignant tree, content to see his prim borders gone vagabond, his hedges swaggering in the rags and feathers of a jungle holiday, his massed perennials glutting themselves with

blossoms, quick and dead scrambled together and no matter, all the way from ashes of umber to bloody crimson and shouting gold.

Sometimes his conscience troubled him a little, though, for there was no way of remembering Marta and Beryl in this saturnalian setting; in these gorged footways there was no room even for their immaculately passionate shadows to pass. But still there was one place where when he was lonely he could go and stand and reinvoke, if not the woman perhaps, the image of the child.

Spring, summer, autumn, Beryl's "grave-yard" never changed. The weeping-willow, the black grass, the lilies of the valley, they seemed to subsist in that somber nook with hardly more respect for the seasons than had the "tombstones" themselves—the pieces of board that Disstan was asked from time to time (and always with the same queer wince of wonder) to inscribe with his whittling-knife.

So the old man could recollect the little girl coming on one or another of those rare days, out of the dazzle of the summer wind into the dank shadow, as vivid as ever but in a changed way, her eyes jewelled with brief, eager tears, her mouth straight and unquivering to the point of sternness, her trowel in one hand, in the other her dead. A pearl-gray elephant, passed away of a ripped felt. A woolly lamb, worn threadbare by squeezing. A blanched pickaninny. And once a hundredth, perfect rose, just opened, which the girl had

torn from the Étoile-de-France bush herself, to save it from its tragedy of "going by."

To-day it was June. But to Beryl it was not June; "J-u-n-e" means nothing. Rather it was "Dianthus." It was "White Columbine." It was yellow warmth beneath a blue tent; cloth of gold under deep heaven.

By the clock it was afternoon, but "aft-er-noon" is only so many syllables; what Beryl wanted was a word that meant "flat on one's back on a rug on the grass on the sunny side of the laurel brake with Bellinda Angelica, and both half drugged by the flower-scents that ride low when the sun rides high, and half dazed by the chaffering of bee and beetle, and half hypnotized by the dissolving patterns of leaves that stir in the wind when there is no wind at all." And the word must mean too that Disstan was knocking old manure out of a barrel, away and away back by the tool-house, and the sound that that made. And that mother was in her room having a beauty-nap, along with the rest of creation. And that to-night, all the way from the City, for dinner, for the first time out here, John Bent was coming.

It occurred to Beryl, with one of those thrills that she took as a harp does, all sorts of wild strings vibrating, "I suppose, Bellinda Angelica, I ought to be napping, myself, to be at my brightest and prettiest, oughtn't I?" As her nature was, the child was yawning already.

But Bellinda had to spoil it by talking.

"You're very, very fond of Mr. Bent, aren't you, Beryl?"

"Oh, I'm perfectly *silly* over him."

"And seeing you've only known the man so very ——"

"Well! I knew him, I guess, before *mother* did. Didn't I?"

"Mmmmm. I suppose—in a way ——"

"Who was it he introduced himself to first, on that boat, right on that deck there, *hours* before he ever even *saw* mother? Tell me that."

"Mmmmm. Mother's very, very fond of him too, don't you think, Beryl?"

"Fond! Goodness! Have you ever *seen* her *look* at *anybody* so—so ——"

Words are feeble things. Beryl could say it in nothing less dazzling than a hug. Bellinda knew those hugs; poor doll, she knew what was coming to her. Slowly, as the sawdust mounted to her head, her eyes "bogged" out; then one (the one that had been bothering her of late), parting the last of its strands of thread, fell off, bounced from fold to fold of the rug, and was lost in the grass.

As always, Beryl was startled and dismayed. "Oh, you poor darling!" With a ferocity she rocked her. "You poor *thing!*" With a wild penitence she embraced her, harder than ever. . . . Consternation

afresh, "Oh, dear, now look; there's *another* rip in your frock *now*. Oh, dear me!"

Beryl lay and brooded. But not for long. She sat up gasping. Her eyes, which chance had fastened on the palings of the distant gate, popped wide. Of all things! Scrambling from the rug, Bellinda Angelica by one arm riding the wind behind her, she ran. She unfastened the gate and stood there beatified.

"*Oooooo!* How *nice* of you to come so *early!*"

John Bent grinned in the way he had. "How do you do, Miss Summerhaze? Words fail to express my joy at laying eye on your sweet self again."

Weakness thrilled Beryl's knees. "Do you honestly, truly mean that?"

"Swear! Am I awfully early, Beryl? I suppose I should have wired ——"

"Nonsense. But why *do* you stand there; why don't you come *in?*"

"I wonder . . ."

Wondered what? For pity's sake! must Beryl skip out and leap like wings into his tweed-prickly arms and fling her arms around his neck and tell him to his long, line-bitten, homely-handsome face how welcome and ten-times-welcome he was at *any* hour? Must she squeeze *him* till *his* eyes bogged out too?

Still, that very thing was partly what made John Bent so exciting, that everlasting mystery as to which he really was—as set in his ways as his jaw made him

look—or as shy and wary and sad as the shadows in the bottoms of his eyes could sometimes be.

"I wonder," he repeated, studying. He wasn't studying Beryl though now, but the flowered and bowered space behind her, inside Marta Summerhaze's wall.

"So this is the Garden—the Garden of ——" He left it at that, and swallowed his Adam's-apple several times. He blew. Then he chuckled.

"I suppose, Beryl, you're sure I'm an idiot now. But it's only because I've been looking forward so—so ——" Again he left it. He recommenced in the tone he had of telling stories.

"Did you ever hear about—well, about—let's see—a fine young colt named Jack—no, 'Prince' is better. About Prince and the bridge? Well, the first time Prince ever set hoof on a bridge, what did it do but go crash right under him. Hurt him a good deal, but scared him much, much worse. So, after that, you may be certain, it was 'No more bridges in mine, thank you!' for *Prince*. No, sir! But by and by that began to seem silly. The casual way the other horses talked about bridges made him begin to doubt. So finally he asked them, 'Do you suppose there really *are* bridges sound enough to carry a fine, loyal, ardent young man-horse across the river?' They snorted, 'Heavens, yes!' . . . 'To the Promised Land?' . . . 'Heavens, yes! Be sure if you come to a bridge without a bar, that bridge will carry you safe across to the

Promised Land.' . . . Well, do you know what? Prince started out again. He came to a bridge again, and though he would have liked very much to turn tail and bolt away, he remembered all he had heard. So he said 'Pshaw!' and tried it. Sound as sound! (What could have seemed sounder than Ethel, and those three years?) And there beyond, straight ahead, the long, bright road to the Promised Land. So —— Do you like this story about Prince, Beryl?"

"I think it's *beautiful*." (What Beryl thought was beautiful was that John Bent should stand here telling it to her, no matter what rigmarole it was.)

"Well, so, out across that bridge young Prince went prancing. Prancing! And then, Beryl, my dear, what did *that* bridge do but go crash—crasher even than the other—and Prince down through the hole, and out of sight in the black river. . . . Do you wonder he was no good for anything but wild woods and waste pastures after Ethel—after *that?* A mean beast with a white eye for any hand that might have oats in it, and a black heart, and burrs in his coat? —— More than burrs, I guess. Have a look, Miss Summerhaze."

With that John Bent did a funny thing; he bent down to give her a sight of his dark hair in which there were a few gray strands, not unbecoming.

"I suppose you understand all this about Prince, Beryl, perfectly?"

"Perfectly." Beryl nodded, her gaze luminous, not with comprehension, but with the thought, "Now that

he's through with all *that.*" Her intuition was right. Laughing aloud, dropping the brown-paper package he had on the grass, he swooped her up in his arms. And so, before they knew it, they were in at the gate and into the garden.

"Prancing!" he cried, with the queerest catch in it.

"Your package," Beryl had to remind him, "that you dropped."

He set her on her feet. "Scat and get it for me, that's an angel."

It was like a long box wrapped up, such a box in the city as flowers come in. If it *was* flowers for mother, out here, that *would* be humorous. But it was heavier than flowers when she picked it up.

She found him standing, studying, around and around him. "By Jimmy Jove!" His face of a sudden was all undone, like a boy's. "This time it's *so!* I don't know why, but I just feel it. It's going to be as true as the Pole Star, here, and as everlasting as the Promised Land."

"Mother's having a nap," Beryl explained. "I'll run and tell her."

"Please, no, don't. Not just yet. Give me —— Wouldn't you like to sit and talk with me somewhere here just a little while? Just you and me?"

Marta and Beryl were so close, so nearly identical, that there never could slip in between them any feeling of comparison, competition, or jealousy. Still, if

John Bent *insisted.* (Bellinda Angelica nearly lost her other eye.)

There may have been conscience after all. For as soon as ever they were ensconced on the bench under the wistaria trellis in face of the oval pool with half a hundred spikes of foxglove and snapdragon up-side-down in it, Beryl began to talk of mother, mother, and nothing but mother.

"She'll be perfectly wild when she knows; *don't* you think I'd better *go?*"

"Patience, lamb. I've simply got to have you a little while, as a kind of—kind of preface-to-mother, you see. You don't see. Well, as a kind of Marta-Summerhaze-in-words-of-one-syllable, for the simple reader to begin on." He wrinkled his eyes and nose. "It was so in the very beginning, remember? And so now, to *re*-begin on——" His laugh was pure exultation. "And how scandalously you do give Marta Summerhaze away! It's low of me, I know."

Mother, daughter, neither had ever known how to look anything but what she thought and felt. So Beryl looked mystified. John Bent pointed.

"For instance, that young person you have there."

"Bellinda Angelica?" Beryl flushed one shade of pink as she cornered an eye down at the doll in her arms. "I know, Mr. Bent; you may think she isn't very pretty now. But when she was newer—younger, I mean——"

"She's quite old, isn't she?"

"Let me see. Oh, terribly. She looks especially old though since she lost that eye, and that happened only just this afternoon."

"How?"

"From me hugging her, I guess, too tight."

"You see?"

"What?"

"Well, here's the Beloved. *I* may think she's quite old; in my eyes she may be tattered, lop-sided and half blind. But in *yours*, Beryl, she is still the—well, look at her—still as shining-beautiful as the day she was born, and still tight in your arms against your heart."

"But who else would I ——"

"Who else, indeed!" John Bent was funny, he gloated so. "That, precisely, is what I wanted to be told for sure and double-sure, before I ——" He slapped his thigh with a mysterious vehemence. "What I wanted Prince to know, about a certain bridge." Bending forward he dropped a kiss on Beryl's hair. "Child, I love you."

Thank heaven! here at last was something without any mystery to it.

"And mother? Do you love mother too?"

The startled man swallowed. But then there came a light into his eyes.

"Well ——" The light was dare-devil. "I'm here."

"Have you brought something to give to mother?"

"I'm afraid I have—no, by the Lord, I'm *not* afraid—if she wants it."

"In that package."

His jaw sagged. But then how he did chuckle.

"No, *that's* not for *mother*. You blessed simpleton, that's for ——" With his mouth shaped for the word, he checked it, and his whole look changed.

Beryl couldn't stand it. All heart-in-the-throat she prompted him.

"For *me?*"

But there he went on staring at Bellinda Angelica, who was naturally at this moment almost a pulp in her arms. And the shadow, which was half like embarrassment, half like self-derision, darkened on his face.

"That's just like a man," he muttered. "Yet how was I to realize?"

"Is it—is it a—*is it a doll?*"

"Forgive me, Beryl. It is."

"No, no, no!" he protested, grinning, when the whirlwind of crumple and crackle was over and the girl was enthroned once more, with the crisply curling, brittly glittering creature in her embrace. "No, Beryl, no need. That's more than enough for thanks now, sweet thing. You know, and I know, that, pretty a doll as she is, after all she's only a doll. She's not Bellinda Angelica."

"I adore her! I love her to *death!*"

He shook an indulgent head, grin widening. "We're

too good friends. And now you'd better whisper in the true-love's ear and not leave her there on the grass too long; it's easy for true-loves to misinterpret—the amenities—toward strangers."

The man was impossible sometimes. Was it because he was afraid she wasn't sufficiently, completely, altogether-utterly *overwhelmed?* Hadn't he *eyes?* Beryl's own eyes, helpless, fell on help.

"Mother!" she screeched, and leaped up, and held her treasure high. "See!"

Marta Summerhaze came across the lawn, treading not on earth but on the tips of the grass-blades, it seemed, so luminous with surprise, so light with gladness. This woman had never known what it was to have to hide her heart. As she neared them her hands, like flowers to the sun, came out.

"John!"

John Bent took the hands as they were given. "Marta!"

"Why wasn't I——"

"Mother! Please do *look!*"

"I see, yes, isn't it too lovely. Weren't you a brick, John, to think of it? But, John . . ."

For a while (was it minutes, was it hours, in that cooling, coloring afternoon?) they roamed the garden, not going anywhere, not caring, caught in more magic mazes than one. Now Beryl was gone, on her own enchanted errands; now she was back with them

again; but this, or that, it made no difference; when Beryl was the third, three was never a crowd.

A garden never yet on land or sea. A walled acre of beginnings. The first pale flush and wonder of peonies uncrinkling. The soft wind of excitement a-tremble among the honeysuckle buds. . . .

Where were the lines in John Bent's face now, the shadows in his eyes? Once there was a memory of them, only once and only for an instant. In passing the rose bank Marta paused to pluck one flower, a marvel of loveliness, full-dowered, uncovering its heart. Beauty for a king. Eyes bright, John Bent held out his coat-lapel, his thumb behind the buttonhole.

Marta looked confused. "Oh, but no. I wasn't going to—John, I hate flowers in buttonholes. They —John, they fade."

For an instant he was the confused one. But then when his eyes, searching for something to fasten on, fastened on Beryl who walked aside, and when he saw that it was the wretched Bellinda she was carrying in her arms (perish him! if he would only give her a *chance* to *explain*) he swallowed and seemed to see a great light, and he grinned a grin.

"Flowers," he agreed with mother, nodding sagaciously, "*do* fade. Mmmm. Marta," he said, "let's *us* never have anything that fades."

"Never, John." It was as simple as a clear spring that has never known the roiling of a wonder or the

muddying of a doubt. Disstan's barrow was there in a cross-alley, half full of wilted prunings. And saying, as simply as though for all the world she thought she was but echoing John Bent's own words, "Never anything, John, when it has begun to fade," with a quick, clean toss Marta sent the blossom in. . . .

Dinner. What did they have for dinner? If Beryl hardly knew, then mother and John Bent could not have known at all. It wasn't anything like dinner anyhow. It was much more like a picnic, served out on the unscreened veranda, at that necromantic hour before the summer dusk when light turns into an actual substance, a thing you can catch in a tumbler and trail your fingers through. And Nelly and Polly in and out soundlessly, their caps and little aprons all changing colors, like ministrants from Faërie.

Then, "Beryl, dear, very presently, you know . . ."

"Yes, mother."

The sun was gone, the moon was there. The perfume of growing things became an inundation. Old flowers, old gardens, sleep at night. Young ones, never.

Again, "Beryl, child, skip to bed. You must. Be a dear."

"Yes, mother, yes."

But Beryl had something to do before she slept tonight.

She would have given anything to have had not happen what did happen, by accident. Because she

saw that John Bent still did not (and could not) understand.

She was passing across the open turf beyond the barberry hedge that walled the walk to the marsh-garden. If she had kept *on* passing it it would have been all right; the trouble was that she loitered to gaze at the moon. She simply had to. Mostly her moods were daylight, the color of the sun alive in the warm sky. But now and then there came times when she must think thoughts the color of the cold moon dead and brilliant in the night. So she was standing, bathed in melancholy, when she became aware of John Bent's eyes in a gap in the hedge-top, fixed upon her in that same grinning, gloating way.

Not a sound. If he had chuckled he would have had to explain to mother, who was evidently there, and it was not for him to give the truant away. So just that flash. And now Beryl saw that behind that grin there *must* be a wince, and under that gloating, mockery. As real as if it had been uttered aloud, "I thought you said you loved her, adored her, that beauty-doll I gave you. Now I *know* it was simply politeness, seeing which one you have there in your arms."

He was gone so soon there was no way of explaining, even in gesture. Even if she could have explained. If he couldn't see for himself why it was Bellinda Angelica she had in her arms out here alone in the

night. If he couldn't see with his own eyes that poor Bellinda was *dead*.

Beryl's mood was so upset by this mischance that for a moment, as she walked on, she forgot she was grieving, and had only that look about the mouth which made Disstan, whom she found awaiting her by the chopping-block with a bit of board in his hand, ill at his ease altogether.

Disstan could never understand.

"That there dolly," he hazarded in protest, "she's been a sweet dolly to you, little Miss."

He was built that way, and there was no use in trying to explain to him. Beryl contented herself with saying, "Thank you, Disstan," as she accepted the whittled "tombstone" with an elbow. "And the trowel?" she added.

He found it for her in the shade of the stump. He shook his head and rubbed his ear, and as she went on her way toward the silvered dome of the weeping-willow she heard him muttering behind her, "I give it up."

Tears, swollen, glittering and brief, wet her eyes as she entered the heavy lace of shadows under the tree; a few, grown too big before they dried, fell into the grave she dug. After all, when you've loved anyone for any length of time, profoundly! . . . But her mouth kept its line, unquivering. There was something about its straightness as clean as mother's quick, clean toss had been, when she flung into the barrow

of past things the rose she would not see begin, even by a little, to wither.

After it was all over, Beryl came out of the graveyard skipping. All finished, all done. The moonlight was another thing *now*—cords of silk and silver to swing on, up to heaven. And up in heaven, in the nursery, with her fainting loveliness, her golden hair that curled and her brown, brown eyes that shut in sleep, was "Gloria Rose," the new love, the true love, waiting.

As Beryl went floating across the dance floor of the open lawn she heard at a distance voices speaking in the marsh-garden walk. One was mother's, interrogative. Another was Disstan's, telling as little as it might:

"But she's gone in to bed now, Lady, so that's all right. . . . Ma'am? . . . Why no, just another of her playthings dead, and she's been giving it burial. Such a sweet dolly too, ma'am. . . . I give it up."

There was a gravelly tread, crunch, crunch, crunch —Disstan on his way, leaving a pother behind him. Out of it, mother's voice, distinctly, "You idiot, John!" And then, in a hail, "Disstan, what doll—what kind of a doll?"

Crunch, crunch, crunch. He could be stubborn, Disstan could, deaf and dumb.

But forget Disstan, forget them all. Remember the moon-ropes to swing on.

Mother and John Bent wouldn't let Beryl forget

them. They still discussed, and she simply had to stop to try to hear. Too late. Now, in place of words, there sounded a perfect fusillade of crunchings, going the other way.

Beryl should have danced on, climbed on among the moonbeams. But curiosity destroys more than cats, and when she heard that mother and John Bent were in the hollow under the weeping-willow it was too much for her; five seconds, and she had her eyes and ears in the outer leaves of the drooping branches.

Something almost as real as a cold hand grabbed her by the throat. She had never in her life even heard of ghouls, but the sight of ghoul-work struck at instincts older than any life of hers. To dig up the dead! It was the first time she had ever been really and truly frightened.

John Bent was on his knees in the spotted dark, digging, as a dog digs with its forepaws. And mother was standing. And mother was making it doubly weird, trebly sacrilegious somehow, by thrilling in her throat like a turtle-dove—pooh-poohs, nonsense, angelic indignation.

"Crazy man!" she carolled. "And did he take my child for a *simpleton?*"

The digger's voice too was like a dog's, full of teeth, "I've got to see."

"That love of a doll, John, and all shining new, too? Do you dream for one second it would be *that one* the babe would be *burying?*"

"I've got to see."

Mother was heavenly. "You will see, O Idiot. You'll find it's just some old, worn-out —— Ah, but I know now. It's that ragamuffin, Bellinda. And high time it is, too. Why, the child's had that doll for—let me see ——"

The dog-paws stopped. "How long, Marta?"

"Let me see. Bob Gregory brought it to her —— Oh, it's been months."

"Only *months?*"

"Heavens, dear man!" Mother could have kissed him for an innocent; you could tell by the husk in her laugh. "You can't have any notion how that child runs through dolls. Look about you. Why, there must be *dozens* of them buried here. I tell you, when that child hugs she means it."

The ghoul-work recommenced. There was no sound but John Bent's breathing.

He came out through the branches into the moonlight, where he could see what he had in his hand, so quickly, and mother so close behind him, that they caught Beryl petrified. Happily, however, they seemed to have no time to be aghast at finding her there.

John Bent took one look at the remains of Bellinda Angelica, lopped in his hand and already dank with the grave-mold. Then something had happened to his face. (Why? It wasn't Gloria Rose; he knew that

now.) Worse happened to his eyes. Beryl had a view of them first, then mother, then Beryl again.

He was by all odds the queerest man. By the look of those eyes you would have thought that Beryl Summerhaze was a bogey jumped out of a corner at him, and that Marta Summerhaze was a skeleton from a closet.

Mother wasn't used to being puzzled. It was funny to hear it now:

"Well, sir, you can see for yourself, can't you? . . . Beryl dear—(what *are* you doing out here, you bad child?) . . . but this silly man was actually afraid it was that darling of a doll he gave you ——"

Beryl let out an elfin shriek. "Gloria *Rose?* Why, I'm wild about Gloria *Rose*, Mr. Bent. Why, I—I—I've only just *begun* to love her."

Mother laughed a sweet witch's laugh. "John, I do believe you were jealous. You *were* afraid, crazy fellow, it was yours."

"Afraid? You mean I was hoping—hoping against hope—it was. Hoping against hope it would be anything, anybody, but this old one."

"But Mr. *Bent*, dear me, I've had her *forever*. And I've only just *got* Gloria *Rose*."

"Can't you see?" The man's voice sounded all lost.

"John, you wouldn't have my baby be a little *idiot?*"

"Can't—can't *either* of you see?"

And when he saw that they couldn't see, there he

stood. Once Beryl had seen a tree just after lightning had struck it. Now John Bent looked like that tree. There had been two squirrels in it, Beryl remembered, not knowing what had happened to them, but by some freak not killed. And those were John Bent's eyes.

He thrust the dead doll into Beryl's hands of a sudden and started off, mother behind him.

Beryl had to reinter the body. Of course there were no tears this time; you only do that once: all she put into the earth now was sawdust, buttons, and rags. Then she hurried away to find the two.

She found only one. Mother stood alone by the front steps, and there was something new and strange about her. It was the hands, Beryl decided. She had never seen mother with her hands pressed to her cheeks before.

"Where's Mr. Brent, mother? In the house?"

Mother started as if she hadn't heard Beryl come. Her answer was no answer. "I'm sorry, but still I can't seem to understand." She was so honest in her simplicity that she didn't even try to hide the wail in it. "If it had been his doll—but it wasn't his doll at all."

Beryl's mind jumped. "Do you mean he's gone? Home?" Dismay. But then her eyes jumped. "He's *not* gone, mother. There he is, down by the gate. See? Leaning. Mother, I think he must have eaten something."

Then, pinching mother's elbow, calling shrilly, "*Mother, he's coming back!*"

Beryl had heard people say of so-and-so, "I wouldn't have known him." Well, such things could be. She wouldn't have known John Bent when he came up the path between the rhododendrons. Not like his walk at any rate.

He used his feet, somehow, as if of a sudden he no longer cared what they trod on or what they crushed. His shoulders were set at a swagger and his face in half-grin, half-grimace.

"What the devil!" It was beyond Beryl why he laughed so recklessly. "*Let* the bridge crash. What's the difference, so long as I know this time, sooner or later it's going to."

It was beyond mother too. "John, I thought for a moment you were really, truly going."

"I was. But when I got to the gate, somehow it stuck; somehow I hadn't the muscle; and the walls are too high for me to climb over at my age. So I stood and threw a kiss ——"

Mother's sigh turned into a catch of laughter. "So long, John, as it wasn't a kiss for good-by."

"It was. Good-by to something that you two would think was —— Oh, nothing, forget it, never mind. Here I am."

Mother was good; she forgot it and never minded. Now how beautiful she was, her hands gone out again,

her lips parted a little, in that way of hers that was like a flower in the morning, drinking.

"Here you are, John ——"

"With open eyes," John Bent finished. why, nobody knew.

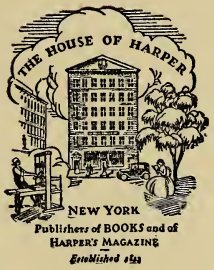
But whatever "open eyes" meant, it reminded Beryl suddenly of china eyes that closed in sleep. So everything now was dear.

"Good-night, mother. Good-night, Mr. Bent; I shall love Gloria Rose forever and ever and *ever*."

"As long as for months, Beryl?" There was something in his merriment the least little bit wry, like the taste of choke-cherries.

"Oh, for months and *months*. Till the very end of summer, really, Mr. Bent. Way till my birthday comes."

And Beryl flew for the stairs.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